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**Ethics, Distance and Accountability: The Political Thought of Rammohun Roy, c. 1803-32.**

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**ETHICS, DISTANCE AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY:  
THE POLITICAL THOUGHT  
OF RAMMOHUN ROY, c.1803-32**

**Shomik Dasgupta**

**A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**2016**

## Abstract

In my thesis I will argue that the most important context of the writings of Rammohun Roy (1772/3(?)–1833) was making the political power of the East India Company accountable to an ethical Bengali public. Rammohun's political thought was concerned with three distinct but related themes: 1) the restructuring of the Company's administration from a distant and invisible government at London to Calcutta; 2) the importance of ethical practice in Bengali society; and 3) the legal and ethical obligation of the Company to be accountable to its subjects. Contrary to current scholarship, I argue that a unity of thought can be identified in Rammohun's writings. The thesis will show that, throughout his career as a native intellectual (1803–32), Rammohun consistently stressed the importance of societal **ethics** and highlighted the consequences of the **distance** between London and Bengal on governmental **accountability**. The title, 'Ethics, Distance and Accountability' articulates this argument by focusing on the core concerns of his political thought.

Rammohun's political thought was influenced by philosophy of *akhlāq*, the *Dharmaśāstras*, as well as by his association with the Company's district administration (1804–14). Rammohun intended his work to be widely read by the Bengali public (*sarvvasadharan lok*), Company officials and the native elite and referred to a diversity of traditions (the *Purāṇas*, Liberal philosophy, British history, Persian poetry and the *Upaniṣads*) to explain his ideas to his intended audience.

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To Ma and Baba, I humbly dedicate this thesis.

September, 2016

London



## Note on Transliteration and Linguistic Usage

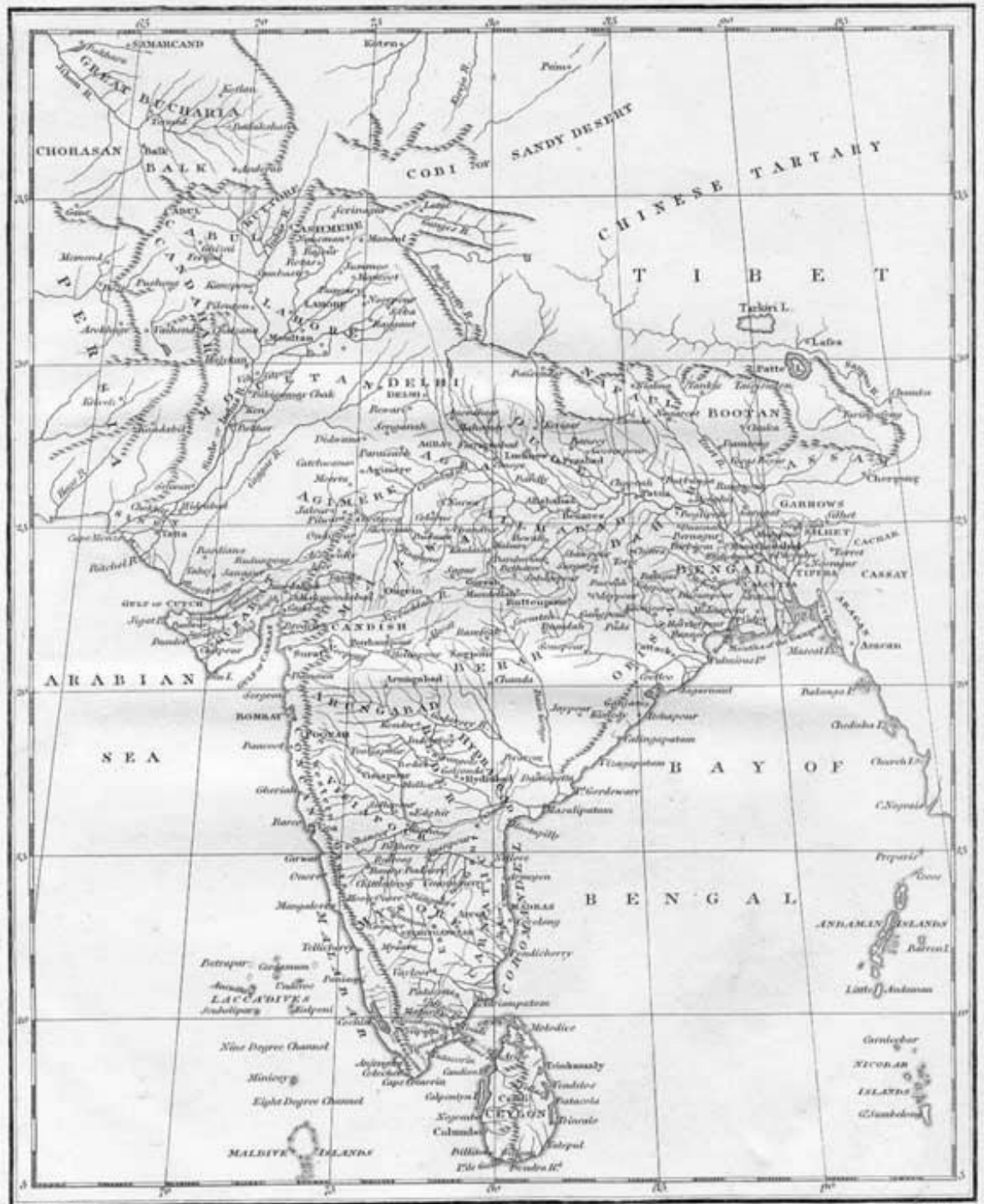
In the case of Sanskrit texts, I have consulted Monier-William's *Sanskrit Dictionary*. At all times, my transliteration was compared to that of the standard translations available on these texts (cited in full in the Bibliography)

There is unfortunately no standard transliteration system available for the Bengali language. The problem is compounded by the linguistic practices of early nineteenth-century scholars who used Bengali and Sanskrit interchangeably. To avoid confusion, only Rammohun's Bengali texts have been transliterated. This has been done as per the system adopted by the editors of his *Collected Bengali Works* (1973).

All Persian texts referred in the thesis are translated texts. I have adopted the same transliterations as the translators themselves. The chief translated text that has been used is *The Nasirean Ethics*. Certain Persian words from Rammohun Roy's writings have been transliterated according to the conventions of Steingass' *Persian English Dictionary*.

Transliterations have not been used for proper nouns.

## Map of India



Adapted from: Rennell, James, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan or the Mogul Empire* (London, 1788).

## **Introduction: Ethics, Distance and Accountability: The political thought of Rammohun Roy, c.1803-1832.**

This thesis argues that the most important context of the writings of Rammohun Roy (1772(?)-1833) was making the political power of the East India Company's government accountable to an ethical Bengali public. Rammohun argued that, from 1765, a distant and invisible government at London had contributed to the misgovernance of Bengal by creating an administrative system which lacked political accountability. Instead, he proposed a new system of government with local centres of power in Bengal accountable to an ethical Bengali public. The most detailed account of this argument can be found in Rammohun's text on governance, *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Revenue and Judicial Systems of India and of the General Character and Conditions of its inhabitants* (henceforth, *Exposition*). The text was published in London, in 1832.

The *Exposition* was Rammohun's last major work. It developed his ideas from earlier writings in Calcutta (such as on the freedom of the press and property law) and explained them by using references which his readership in London would have been familiar with. For example, the *Exposition* referred to the work of the Tory lawyer and legal commentator, Sir William Blackstone (1723-80) to explain ideas of rural administration in Bengal. The *Exposition's* strategy of using familiar references for the intended readership was not unique to the text. As the thesis will show, Rammohun explained his ideas to his readers using a diversity of terms, references, philosophies and texts.

Current scholarship has however failed to account for the methods by which Rammohun articulated his ideas and the role of colonial governance in his writings. Historians have also confused Rammohun's various attempts to reach out to his intended audience. As Andrew Sartori observed, this has led to 'a long tradition of finding in Rammohun whatever one happens to be looking for; be it cosmopolitanism, anglophilia or proto-nationalism; neo Hinduism, ecumenism or proto-secularism; democratic values, class ideology or native corruption'.<sup>1</sup> A brief overview of the recent scholarship on the political thought of Rammohun can help us substantiate this observation.<sup>2</sup>

In 1958, Rammohun's biographer, Iqbal Singh noted that Rammohun's political thought 'has remained a puzzle and almost a paradox'<sup>3</sup> in historical scholarship. Singh's observation wasn't new or remarkable. Rather, it can be seen as a representative of the views of historians at the time. Even in the 1940's, scholars such as Rajani Palme Dutt and A.R. Desai perceived Rammohun to be a 'contradictory' thinker.<sup>4</sup> Both historians were uncertain whether Rammohun was a visionary precursor to late-nineteenth century Indian nationalism or a misguided colonial apologist.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturism in the Age of Capital*, (London, 2008), 77.

<sup>2</sup> 'Brief overview' does not imply that Rammohun was not a subject of historical writings in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Earlier works on Rammohun c.1880-1941 include N.N. Chatterjee, *Mahatma Rammohun Ray Jibancharitra* [A Life of Rammohun Roy], (Calcutta, 1881); B.B Majumdar, *History of Political Thought from Rammohun to Dayanand, c. 1821-84*, (Calcutta, 1934), 1-77; J.K. Majumdar, *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selection from the Records (1775-1845)* (Calcutta, 1941), Sophia Collet, *Life and Letters of Rammohun Roy* (London, 1900).

<sup>3</sup> Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy: A Biographical Inquiry into the Making of Modern India*, 3 vols. (Bombay, 1958), i, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986), 23-4.

In 1946, Susobhan Sarkar's *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* attempted to change this perspective of Rammohun. Sarkar established a sophisticated conceptual framework of intellectual history- the Bengal Renaissance.<sup>5</sup> Loosely based on an analogical reference to the European Renaissance in the twelfth century, this framework described the creative approaches of Bengali intellectuals to contemporary politics and religion.<sup>6</sup> According to Sarkar, Rammohun inaugurated a phase of new approaches to social, religious, literary and political concerns and produced an 'awakening' in Bengal. Sarkar's concept of the 'Bengal Renaissance' perceived Rammohun as a Calcutta intellectual (c.1815-30). Rammohun's first work, the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* (written in Murshidabad) as well as his association with the East India Company's administration (1804-14) in the provincial and frontier districts of Bengal was ignored. Instead, the focus was on presenting Rammohun as an urban Liberal intellectual, engaged in a scholarly 'synthesis' between 'Eastern' and 'Western' thought. According to Sarkar, Rammohun's 'Eastern' influences consisted of the *Advaita Vedānta*, Tibetan Buddhism, Sanskrit culture and Perso-Arabic 'lore'; and 'Western' engagements referred to Benthamite radicalism and Liberal thought.

According to Sarkar, Rammohun's scholarly 'synthesis' of 'Eastern' and 'Western' thought did not lead to a unity of thought but contributed to the pursuit of two distinct projects, which could be categorised as 'religious' and 'economic'. In this view, Rammohun's religious project was concerned with a Liberal interpretation of Hinduism and Christianity, while his economic ideas were concerned with an assessment of the

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<sup>5</sup> Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *Dynamics of Social Change in Bengal c.1817-1851* (Calcutta, 1990), vii.

<sup>6</sup> Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance*, 20.

‘bourgeoisie economy’ in Bengal. Though the two projects were distinct, Sarkar did however hint that there may be a ‘link’ between them:

Rammohun’s religion undoubtedly links up with his dreams of a new Bengal with intellectual social and even political reforms. It **ushers in a modern age** in our country.<sup>7</sup> (Emphasis mine)

Sarkar did not however develop the ‘link’ between Rammohun’s ‘religious’ and ‘economic’ projects. I argue that this created an element of ambivalence about Rammohun’s political thought in later scholarship. For example, Nemai Bose writing from a ‘Bengal Renaissance’ perspective in 1960 opined that ‘Rammohun’s views were marked by ‘confusion and contradiction’<sup>8</sup>. Bose can be seen as a representative example of the problems faced by historians who followed Sarkar’s ‘Bengal Renaissance’ framework. I argue that it was the refusal of historians to view Rammohun from any other context than that of a Calcutta intellectual that led to his assessment as a confused and contradictory thinker. This argument will be substantiated in Chapter three of the thesis.

In 1975, the conceptual framework of the Bengal Renaissance was criticised by Sumit Sarkar, Rajat Ray, Barun De and Ashok Sen.<sup>9</sup> Their works emphasised that Rammohun’s importance had been greatly exaggerated by previous historians. They did not perceive Rammohun as a visionary modern thinker. For instance, Sumit Sarkar argued that Rammohun’s ideas did not ‘usher in the modern age’ but rather was at

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<sup>7</sup> Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance*, 91.

<sup>8</sup> Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Awakening in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1960), 27-55.

<sup>9</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Black Hole of the Empire: The History of Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, 2012), 141. Chatterjee argues that De, Sarkar and Sen can be seen as a group of historians belonging to a specific school of history writing.

odds with the contemporary economic condition of Bengal.<sup>10</sup> In this context, he criticised Rammohun for not focussing on developments such as peasant rebellions and de-industrialisation and for ignoring 'the reality of colonial subjection'.<sup>11</sup> Sumit Sarkar however agreed with the 'Bengal Renaissance' interpretation of Rammohun's political thought as that of a Liberal thinker. Barun De also presented Rammohun as a Liberal thinker.<sup>12</sup>

The 1975 critique continued to see Rammohun as a 'contradictory' thinker.

Rammohun, Sarkar argued, demonstrated 'no urge to transform society' but was the rather a misleading and 'deeply contradictory' thinker.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, Ashok Sen presented Rammohun as an isolated and misguided thinker.<sup>14</sup> Rajat Ray argued that Rammohun was a contradictory figure in imperial politics for seemingly agreeing with and critiquing Company politics at the same time.<sup>15</sup> This can also be seen in the works of other historians. For instance, Arabinda Poddar wrote in 1977 that Rammohun was '[...] caught in the infructuous and bewitching obsession of anglophilism which was destined to lose it vigour'<sup>16</sup>

In this context, we note that by presenting Rammohun as an isolated, contradictory and Liberal, the critiques of Sen and Sumit Sarkar was very similar to earlier historians such as Nemaï Bose and Susobhan Sarkar. This may have also been due to a

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<sup>10</sup> Sumit Sarkar, 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past' in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (New Delhi, 1975), 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> Sarkar, 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past', 47.

<sup>12</sup> De, 'Rammohun Roy', 146.

<sup>13</sup> Sarkar, 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past', 47.

<sup>14</sup> Ashok Sen, 'The Bengal Economy and Rammohun Roy', in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (New Delhi, 1975), 103.

<sup>15</sup> Rajat Ray, 'Introduction', in V.C. Joshi ed. *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation of India* (Delhi 1975), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Arabinda Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal: Search for Identity* (Shimla, 1977), 1.

methodological similarity. As Partha Chatterjee noted, 'even in their critique [of Renaissance] these historians did not relinquish the analogy of European history as their basic reference'.<sup>17</sup> Thus their writings failed to provide a new interpretation of Rammohun's work.

I argue that another possible reason for the failure of the 1975 critique to produce a new interpretation could be the lack of engagement with the category of the *bhadralok* developed by S.N. Mukherjee in 1970.<sup>18</sup> Mukherjee developed the concept of *bhadralok* as an interpretation of Marxist ideas of class. He argued that:

I refer to *bhadralok* as a social class. Although it is now fashionable in the academic world to discard the concept of class altogether, I still find it a valuable intellectual tool in analysing the social and political development of modern India. Recently the *bhadralok* has been described as a 'status group' and not a 'class'. It seems to me that to describe the *bhadralok* as a 'status group' or alternatively 'a mere category' is to ignore the economic changes and the social mobility of Bengal in the nineteenth century'.<sup>19</sup>

Mukherjee's concept of *bhadralok* denoted a distinct shift from 'analogies of European history' of the Bengal Renaissance and the 1975 critique. This is because he emphasised that Bengal intellectual history needed to be seen in its own context.

Mukherjee also argued that Rammohun Roy and his contemporaries were *abhijat bhadraloks* (eminent men).<sup>20</sup> However, he noted that Rammohun's contemporaries

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<sup>17</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Mukherjee locates his study of Bengali intellectual History in Karl Marx, *The class struggles in France 1848-1850* (Moscow, 1950), i, 128-31 and *The Eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, 1950), i, 303. S.N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in India', in S.N. Mukherjee and Edmund Leach (eds.), *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970), 52.

<sup>19</sup> Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics', 51.

<sup>20</sup> Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics', 46.



such as Radhakanta Deb did not consider him to be an *abhijat bhadralok* (eminent man) because of their hostility towards him and because 'eminent men' in the early-nineteenth century referred to Bengali families who had been living in Calcutta since the late-eighteenth century whereas Rammohun moved into Calcutta comparatively late, in 1815.<sup>21</sup>

According to Mukherjee, Rammohun's ideas were not a product of contemporary Calcuttan intellectual contexts, but rather of the districts (*Muffasal*) where he had been associated with the Company from 1803-14:

[...] small traders, junior administrators and small land holders who made money working as junior partners (*banyan or dewan*) of the English East India Company and free merchants.<sup>22</sup>

Mukherjee strongly hinted at the possibility of a Bengali intellectual 'class' writing and thinking about the Company in the context of their association with it.<sup>23</sup> This was a departure from previous perspectives of Rammohun which did not consider his association with the East India Company to be of any importance. Mukherjee's suggestion also had methodological implications since it raised the question of connections between institutional and intellectual history.

However, Mukherjee's suggestions were not been taken up by later scholars. For example, historical scholarship in the 1980's referred to Rammohun's employment

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<sup>21</sup> Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics', 47-48.

<sup>22</sup> Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics', 49.

<sup>23</sup> Mukherjee defines class as 'a *de facto* social group which holds a common position among some continuum of the economy, enjoys a common style of life and is conscious of its existence as a class organised to further its ends [which is] a style of life and consumption of goods linked with the acquisition of goods'. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics', 52.

with the Company but did not develop it in any significant detail. As Chitrabrata Palit wrote:

Rammohun Roy is remembered not simply because he was the herald of the [Bengal] Renaissance. He was [also] the first to make the ryot's [peasant] cause a public issue. His intimate knowledge of the revenue system made his analysis of the problem incisive.<sup>24</sup>

We note that Palit's assessment concerns the importance of Rammohun's ideas as a source for the study of agrarian history. It does not indicate that Rammohun's 'intimate knowledge of the revenue system' was in any way related to his political thought. It seemed that by the 1980's, historians had accepted that Rammohun was a contradictory, and confused historical figure and that the debate had, at least for the time being, been settled. Implicit in such assessments was the view that Rammohun's ideas on revenue were distinct from his interpretation of religion.

In 1988 however, a fresh assessment of the concerns and methods of Bengal intellectual history was made by Christopher Bayly in *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. Bayly stressed the importance of a particular social context to early nineteenth century history:

A balanced view of the Indian reformers of the early-nineteenth century would need to take into account their adaptation of Western methods of argument and education, the creation of an educated public and historical interpretation of India's past- and future. Yet it is striking how limited was the social vision and social impact of these stirrings. Partly no doubt this was because the reformers hailed from embattled elite whose dynamism, economic and moral, was constricted by the colonial situation. It was the British who controlled schools, banks and

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<sup>24</sup> Chitrabrata Palit, *New Viewpoints on Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta, 2006), 116.

public offices. At the same time religious rationalism, debated often in Sanskrit and English was unlikely to find echoes in a society which saw its moral future either in the spread of hierarchy and ancient righteousness or in movements of simple devotion to go ahead.<sup>25</sup>

Christopher Bayly's ideas of 'balanced view' was significantly different from the Marxist approach (the 1975 critique). Bayly did not perceive early-nineteenth century reform purely within an economic analysis but pointed to an important socio-historical context that Bengali reformers, particularly Rammohun, was concerned with- the interpretation of the past and the Calcuttan public sphere. He argued that Rammohun belonged to a native elite which was influenced by Sanskritic traditions of rationality and debate and opined that the influence of his ideas was limited due to the 'constricted' nature of colonial institutions rather than Rammohun's inability to understand the political and economic context of contemporary Bengal. Bayly's argument highlighted the importance of contextualising the study of intellectual history with colonial governance. In this context, Bayly noted that the Company's government was primarily a response to social and intellectual contexts which officials would have been unused to in Britain.

Bayly's argument on colonial governance has been developed further by Jon Wilson who shows that the early-colonial period was a phase of administrative confusion in Bengal and refers to it as 'a type of panic where [Company] officers possess information but do not have the conceptual framework to process it into 'useful knowledge'.<sup>26</sup> As Wilson argues:

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1988), 164.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Wilson, 'The Making of a Colonial Order: Information, uncertainty and order in Colonial Bengal', *Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Occasional Paper*, (6)2003, 13.

British officials rarely perceived themselves as existing within the frame of the social dynamics that they ruled. Until well into the early-nineteenth century they did not believe that they were actively transforming Bengali society by making its laws.<sup>27</sup>

According to Wilson, everyday governance in Bengal was severely hampered by the inability of Company officials to resolve issues of 'manners, customs and order'.<sup>28</sup> This form of government had consequences for the development of a specific type of intellectual history. Wilson argues that:

What Historians have failed to note is that conceptions of Bengali society and of the role of the state and legislation [...] were not transported magically from Europe but were forged in colonial debate. The language of law and society was different in nineteenth century Bengal's Anglophone public sphere from the vocabulary of intellectual life in Britain. Colonial India has an intellectual history of its own.<sup>29</sup>

Following Bayly, Wilson contextualises Rammohun's views on Company administration and law as 'rules which had a separate existence from the [Company] institutions which governed them'. Wilson and Bayly's research clearly shows that the Company was either not interested or too confused with its own concerns regarding legal codes of administrative procedure to be able to engage or even provide a context for new developments in native intellectual thought. Wilson's work provides us a different perspective of Rammohun's political thought. Rammohun is seen as an intellectual who responded creatively to the new institutional developments in Bengal. This interpretation is in sharp contrast to earlier perspectives because it presents

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson, 'The Making of a Colonial Order', 8.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, 'The Making of a Colonial Order', 18.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, 'The Making of a Colonial Order', 22.

Rammohun as an intellectual who is very specifically responding to rules, regulations and governments formed for an Indian political context.

Bayly and Wilson however are not the only examples of new methodologies in Indian intellectual history and its implications for the study of the political thought of Rammohun Roy. We see for example, that their concern with the contextualisation of native intellectual thought with colonial governance was interpreted differently by Sudipta Kaviraj:

The British administration was naturally negligent about cultural life in its empire. The British did introduce cultural forms which they saw as a part of the civilising process of modernity but they were hardly interested in producing in their imperial dominions something similar to the cultural homogeneity of nationalist Europe. From the late-eighteenth century, British power expanded with astonishing rapidity and this prompted the question of clearly defined territorial structures. Bengalis duly developed sub-imperialistic delusions about themselves. The delineation of the cultural boundaries of Bengal was not the product of the colonial state but of the new Bengal intelligentsia.<sup>30</sup>

Kaviraj does not consider Bengali intellectuals associated with the Company administration who were familiar with its methods of governance and its laws. While this is similar to Wilson, we see two very different conceptual perspectives in the work of both historians. Wilson approaches intellectual history from the standpoint of the everyday problems of the Company in Bengal. Kaviraj on the other hand, interprets the

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<sup>30</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The two histories of Literary cultures in Bengal', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (London, 2003), 537-8.

intellectual history of early-nineteenth century Bengal as the beginning of a modernity brought about by the 'liberal state' in the early-nineteenth century.

As Thomas Metcalf argues, the 'liberal state' referred to institutions of private property, rule of law and liberty of the individual in Bengal as a result of British liberal philosophy as the dominant ideology.<sup>31</sup> Metcalf's ideas find an important conceptual basis in the work of Sudipta Sen who argues that land reforms, reforms of 'custom' and market reforms of the Company state in Bengal were inspired by the 'ruling ideology' of liberalism. Sen associated liberalism with the political unit of the Empire. He argues in the context set forth by Uday Singh Mehta, that liberal philosophy and notions of Empire were not contradictory but complementary ideologies.<sup>32</sup>

Metcalf and Sen perceive Rammohun's writings as a part of the political unit of Empire which had been created by the Company in India. They argue that the vocabulary of Empire during this period was based on the philosophy of Liberalism. It follows that Rammohun would *necessarily* be a Liberal. While earlier historians had also referred to Rammohun as a Liberal thinker (Sumit Sarkar, Barun De and Susobhan Sarkar for example), Metcalf and Sen broke new conceptual ground by stressing that Rammohun's Liberalism was not due to an adherence to intellectual trends in Europe, but because Liberalism was the political currency and language of the British Empire. This is an interpretation of Rammohun's Liberalism which perceives his ideas in the context of a global discourse of Liberal ideas, brought about by a global Empire.

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<sup>31</sup>Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 2003), 35.

<sup>32</sup> Sudipta Sen, 'Liberal government and illiberal trade: The Political Economy of "Responsible Government" in Early-British India', in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and Empire* (Cambridge, 2004), 140.

Rammohun's Liberalism is seen as his attempt to intervene in a political language which had begun to inform a very crucial aspect of Empire- law and governance.

Closely linked to this argument was the assumption that colonial forms of government brought modernity in Bengal in the early-nineteenth century. As Victor van Biljert argued, modernity referred to new ideas of government, new theories of society and an emphasis on social reform as against a 'traditional' notion of government.

Ultimately, this led to the creation of the modern subject. The modern subject was also formed by a public sphere which articulated a language of rights and a civil society.<sup>33</sup> Following Biljert's concept of modernity and the modern subject, we find that Rammohun is referred to as a modern subject in a number of historical works in the 1990's and this continues to be the case even today. For example, Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* argued that Rammohun was an 'English-educated colonial subject'<sup>34</sup> and a 'Hindu social reformer with a 'Baconian intellect'.<sup>35</sup>

Viswanathan's work can be seen also as a rejection of earlier forms of historiography. First, Rammohun is not seen either as 'two' intellectuals- the 'economic' and the 'religious' but rather as a unified intellectual category: the colonial subject. Secondly, Viswanathan argues that Rammohun is not a contradictory figure, but rather as a colonial intellectual at Calcutta responding to a British intellectual context. This categorisation of Rammohun however was beset with problems. Rammohun did not view himself as English-educated, but rather (as Chapter three will show) he stressed that he was the product of a *madrasa* education. Nor did he see himself as a colonial

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<sup>33</sup> Victor van Biljert, 'The Idea of Modernity: European Progress for the rest of the world?' in Jos Gommans and Gyan Prakash (eds), *Circumambulations in South Asian History* (Leiden, 2003), 283-306.

<sup>34</sup> Gauri Vishwanathan, *The Masks of Conquest* (New York, 1989), 99.

<sup>35</sup> Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 123.

subject. He viewed his political position as a subject of the 'British Crown' and critiqued the 'local government' of the East India Company. Further, Rammohun denied being a social reformer in his writings. The concept of reform and subjectivity in the early-nineteenth century had very different meanings from the ones that is presented of him. Rammohun is subsumed within a British intellectual world, but his own intellectual context, as an intellectual responding to contemporary social practices in Bengal is ignored.

Biljert's perspective of Rammohun Roy as a modern subject, engaged in a debate about modern government and modern social practices has been given a fresh perspective by Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee has shifted the contours of the debate on Rammohun Roy and intellectual history by focussing on a new set of concerns. He argues that the colonial government brought about a very specific form of 'dominant' and 'subordinate' relations and opines that any study on Indian intellectual history has to take into account, 'the specific ways in which frameworks of thought conceived in the context of the dominant culture are received and transformed in the subordinate culture'.<sup>36</sup> In chapter two I will show that Chatterjee's views on 'dominant' and 'subordinate' culture can be qualified with a focus on the working relations between native employees and Company officials of the East India Company from 1765-1814.

Chatterjee's ideas have been very influential in the study of Indian intellectual history. Following his suggestions, historians now focus on new concerns: (1) 'the effectiveness of thought as a vehicle of social change', (2) 'the relation of thought to the existing culture of society' and (3) the 'new meanings' that are produced in the thought of a

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<sup>36</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 27.



subordinate culture as a result of such an exchange with the dominant culture'.<sup>37</sup>

These concerns, questions and approaches are collectively known by the term 'colonial modernity'.

In this context, we note that Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* can be seen as an example of a work influenced by Chatterjee's ideas. Chakrabarty argues that the intellectual trends in Europe were not imitated by Indian intellectuals, but rather domiciled and localised in their writings. In this sense, Europe was 'provincialized' in Indian intellectual thought.<sup>38</sup> This is a response to points (2) and (3) noted above. We see that the 'provincialization' of European intellectual trends in Indian intellectual culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows how Indian intellectuals creatively responded to European political ideas.

Thus, Chakrabarty argues that Rammohun's project had 'striking parallels' to European enlightenment philosophy, British Liberalism and Utilitarian thought but was not a mere copy of these ideas.<sup>39</sup> They were moulded according to his specific concerns in the Indian context. This was also how European thought became a 'vehicle of social change' in India. He argues that Rammohun may have been influenced by Enlightenment ideas on emotion and public action to formulate his own reform project against *Sati*.<sup>40</sup> Chakrabarty did not restrict the scope of Rammohun's political project to a discussion of 'provincializing' European ideas but also suggested that Rammohun's

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<sup>37</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 119.

ideas may have been influenced by Hindu scripture. He did not however develop this suggestion any further.<sup>41</sup>

Andrew Sartori however developed Rammohun's ideas of scripture in significant detail. According to him, Rammohun interpreted Hindu scripture as part of a Liberal project. For example, Rammohun's translation of Shankara's *Advaita Vedānta* in English was a liberal doctrine of rights, duties, laws and practices concerned with modernist projects such as human equality and property rights. As Sartori argued:

Rammohun [...] was delving into and drawing from the literatures of modern Europe, but that tells us little about Bengali modernism. It was not just European modernity from which [he was] drawing inspiration but Western Liberalism. [This] in turn leads us to two further fundamental questions: Firstly whence came the enthusiasm for this specific strand of European political ideology, a strand at best ambiguously articulated in the Company's political/economic agenda and far from being coextensive with the full spectrum of modern British ideological imaginations ? And secondly, how did they find an object for their discourse if their liberalism was so utterly disjunctive from their social environment?<sup>42</sup>

Sartori thus argues that Rammohun localised the project of western liberalism in India. He also assumes that Rammohun's historical context was that of a colonial modernist project in Bengal. This is because Liberalism is seen as the 'ideological structure' of Rammohun's writings. In chapter three and four, I present a critique of Sartori's ideas and show that these conclusions are due to a lack of emphasis on early modern intellectual history.

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<sup>41</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 127.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2008), 71.

Christopher Bayly's *Recovering Liberties* agreed with Sartori and attempted to place Rammohan in his own historical context of the early 19th century.<sup>43</sup> Bayly argued that Rammohun's tracts and interventions in the Calcuttan public sphere through legislation and public discourses led to the first attempt by a Bengali intellectual to create 'Indian School of Liberalism'.<sup>44</sup> According to Bayly, Rammohun contributed to a global history of Liberal ideas on liberal constitutionalism.<sup>45</sup> In chapter four I will argue that Bayly's conception of the constitutional liberalism of Rammohun Roy is an incomplete argument. This is because it contradicts Rammohun's own view of British political practice that *it did not work in India*. Secondly, Bayly also ignores Rammohun's main argument that Company's government in India was not accountable to either the natives or to officials in London.

Bayly conceptualised Rammohun's political thought as a 'moment'. Perceiving the historical character of Rammohun Roy as a 'moment' however have brought some historians to paradoxical assessments. For example, Partha Chatterjee's *Black Hole of the Empire* agreed with Bayly's conceptualisation of Rammohun Roy and concluded

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<sup>43</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Recovering Liberties* (Cambridge, 2011), 34-38.

<sup>44</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 50. The basic argument of *Recovering Liberties* can be found in two earlier works; *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004), 293; 'Rammohun Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800-30', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (2007), 25-41. Here we have taken *Recovering Liberties* as our text since it is the most developed form of Bayly's ideas of Rammohun Roy.

Bayly's arguments on liberalism have been widely recognised and accepted: Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* (Delhi, 2005), 32; Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India* (Cambridge, 2007), 20-3; Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2008), 87-92; Partha Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global practice of Power* (Princeton, 2012), 155; Javed Majeed, 'Introduction', *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam by Muhammad Iqbal*, ed. Saed Sheikh (Stanford, 2012), xi; David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), 30; Barnita Bagchi, 'Connected and entangled histories: writing histories in the Indian context', *International Journal of the History of Education*, 6(2014), 30. Elena Vladameri, 'The Influence of Liberalism in the Definition of the Idea of the Nation in India', *La Révolution française*, 8(2015), 6.

that 'Rammohun remains a paradox that has vexed historians'.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Lynn Zastoupil agreed with Bayly's 'moment' and presented Rammohun as a paradoxical figure.<sup>47</sup> Thus, their works assess Rammohun's ideas in the same way as they were seen by Iqbal Singh in the 1950's- a puzzle and a paradox.

This thesis is an attempt to resolve this historical problem. It does not perceive Rammohun as a puzzle or a paradox. It argues that Rammohun's writings articulated a consistent political project concerned with social ethics and accountable governance. Rammohun employed a diversity of categories and concepts to explain this argument to a readership of Bengali society and Company officials at Calcutta and London.

As the first chapter of this thesis will show, Rammohun's ideas for restructuring the current system of governance in the *Exposition* was an important concern of his political thought. A considerable portion of the text was devoted to showing how accountability in revenue and judicial administration could be achieved with a major shift in administrative responsibility from British and European Company officials to native employees.

As a political thinker, Rammohun was deeply influenced by his experiences as a native employee with the East India Company and developed his ideas of accountability and administration from that perspective. Native employees were central to the *Exposition's* argument about local power and distance. Rammohun also asserted that although native employees had very important roles on Company administration, their contributions were not officially recognised.

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<sup>46</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Calcutta*, 141.

<sup>47</sup> Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York, 2010), 1-8.

Rammohun's emphasis on native employees has been a subject of very limited scholarly engagement. The everyday working lives and administrative responsibilities of native employees in the East India Company's revenue administration in the late eighteenth century in Bengal is also an understudied area of historical research.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the *Exposition's* arguments lead to two unanswered questions; first, was Rammohun exaggerating the role of native employees? And second, is it possible to trace the historical and institutional context of native officials in the East India Company?

These two questions are addressed in the second chapter where I argue that Rammohun's emphasis on the importance of native employees has to be seen from the perspective of his own association with Company administration (1803-14). During this period, Rammohun worked as *Munshi*, *Faujdar* and *Dewan*, in official as well as unofficial capacities, in different administrative divisions such as provincial capitals (Murshidabad), districts in the 'interior' of Bengal (Decca-Jelalpur, Ramghur and Bhagalpur) and frontier districts (Rangpur). This contributed to a broad experience of Company administration. Although official records on Rammohun's association with the Company are very sparse, I argue that an examination of the district revenue and judicial records of the Company enable us to gain a perspective of the everyday

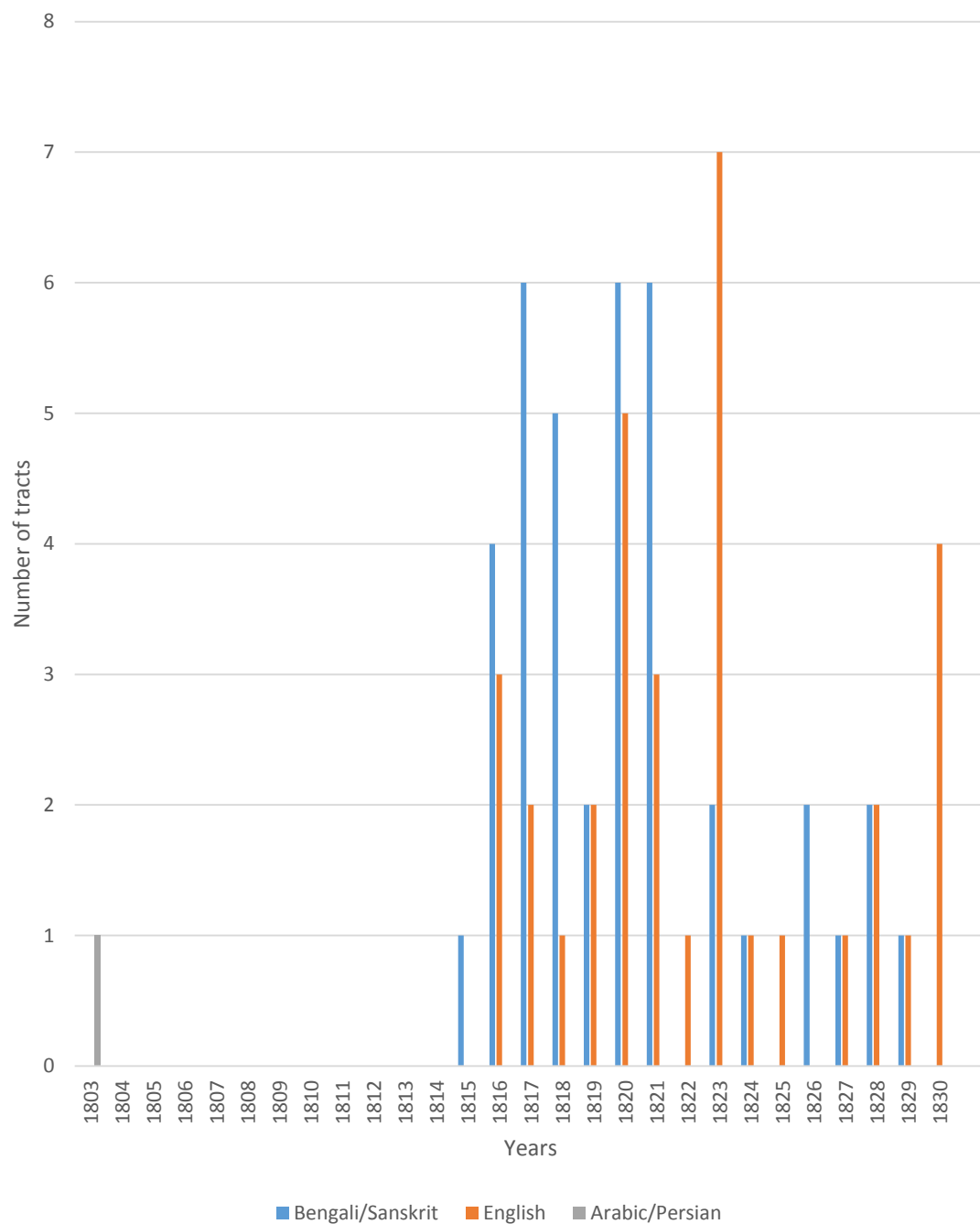
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<sup>48</sup> As chapter two will show in greater detail, this area has been the focus of the following historical works: Fredrick Lehmann, 'The Eighteenth Century Transition in India: Responses of some Bihar Intellectuals' (Wisconsin Univ. PhD. Thesis, 1967); P.J. Marshall, 'Indian Officials under the East India Company in Eighteenth Century Bengal', *Bengal: Past and Present*, 84 (1967); Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *The Career of Rajah Rai Durlabham Mahindra, Rai Durlabh, Diwan of Bengal, 1710-70* (Calcutta, 1974) and *Sisir Kumar Das, Sahebs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William* (Calcutta, 1978). We note that the period of 1960-1980 witnessed focussed work in this area, after which the onwards, the emphasis on this field declined.

administrative responsibilities of native officials during the same period as Rammohun's association and in the same districts that he worked.

The discussion of Rammohun's association with the East India Company is also motivated by the necessity of accounting for a gap in his writings. As the graph in the next page shows, we have no evidence of any writings by Rammohun during the period 1804-14. And till date, historians have not been concerned with this gap in his work. I argue however that an ignorance of this crucial gap has led to a basic misunderstanding of his political project. Ignoring Rammohun's association with the Company has led to the assumption that Rammohun was *not* concerned with Company governance but was rather a Calcutta intellectual. Accounting for the gap on the other points to another conclusion: that Rammohun's writings in Calcutta were *influenced* by his association with the Company. The stress on governmental accountability that we find in his Calcutta writings can thus be contextualised.

Figure 1: Rammohun's Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Sanskrit and English Works, 1803-30



Created by the author from information contained in Table 1 (p.350-60) and Table 2 (361-367)

Chapter two also discusses Rammohun's association with the Company in the larger context of the role of native employees in district administration in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The chapter makes two important arguments; first, that Rammohun's assessment of the crucial importance of the native officials in Company administration was not exaggerated. The *Exposition* was in fact referring to a historical context which can be verified and analytically reconstructed through archival evidence; and second, that Rammohun's ideas of distance, local government, and governmental accountability in the *Exposition* were almost certainly informed by his experiences as a native official.

Our discussion of the *Exposition* and an examination of its historical and institutional context does not however articulate or even refer to Rammohun's ideas of ethics. This lacunae is addressed in the third chapter which argues that his ideas of ethics (and more specifically ethical *practice*) was first introduced in the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn*, a tract written in Arabic and Persian published in 1803 in Murshidabad. I argue that *Tuḥfat* was influenced by the political philosophy of *akhlāq*, and its ideas bore a strong resemblance to the principal text of genre, the *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī* by Nasir ad-Din Tusi (1201-1274).

The *Tuḥfat* was addressed to a readership of native elite. It was also a response to an extant Persian intellectual tradition which was widely recognised in Bengal by not only native intellectuals but also institutions such as the Fort William College and the Calcutta School Book Society which gave a new impetus to the accessibility of Persian literature and philosophy (including the *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*) by translating them to English.



The *Tuhfat*'s ideas also influenced Rammohun's subsequent writings in Calcutta (1815-30). The chapter will show that an *examination* of the conceptual similarities between the *Tuhfat* and later writings at Calcutta reveal the extent to which Rammohun's political thought can be seen as a consistent argument, articulated in many languages, to different readerships.

Rammohun's readership was not however restricted to his Bengali readers. A crucial aspect to his political thought was to make his ideas accessible to Bengalis *as well as* Company officials. In Chapter four, I argue that this was especially the case in works on property law- *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance* (1822) and *Essay on the Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property according to the Law of Bengal* (1830).

Rammohun's tracts on property law referred to familiar concepts such as Liberalism, parliamentary government, constitutions, the division of executive and legislature and familiar late eighteenth century texts such as *Commentaries on the laws of England* (1765-9) by the prominent Tory lawyer and legal theorist, Sir William Blackstone (1723-80) to articulate and explain Rammohun's political project to an intended readership of Company's officials. Rammohun also cited Orientalist scholars such as William Jones and H.T. Colebrook who would have been familiar figures to Company officials.

The fourth chapter shows that Rammohun's tracts on property law were an interpretation of his ideas of the ancient Hindu tradition of the *Dharmaśāstras*. I argue that the relationship between ethics and governmental accountability in his political thought can be seen in his interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras*. Rammohun's reference to the *Dharmaśāstras* was not unusual. As Brian Hatcher has shown, the

*Dharmaśāstras* were texts of debate amongst contemporary Bengali intellectuals, particularly Sanskrit *pandits*. Hatcher argues that from 1820-80, *Dharmaśāstras* were employed by Bengali intellectuals to articulate their views on ‘the existing norms of textual authority, social order, debate and argumentation to engage with an emerging set of colonial policies, institutions, material tools and professional opportunities’.<sup>49</sup> In this context he opines that Bengali intellectuals who referred to the *Dharmaśāstras* were not reinterpreting these texts based on a classical liberal or conservative ideology, but rather attempting to ‘explore’ new social contexts, practices and colonial technologies using pre-modern forms of thought.<sup>50</sup> He refers to this argument by the term ‘shastric imaginary’.<sup>51</sup>

Hatcher also refers to the Rammohun’s writings on *Sati*, opining that his ideas were mainly influenced by the *Dharmaśāstras*. However, Hatcher does not develop this argument further. Neither does he consider that Rammohun’s interpretations of the *Dharmaśāstras* may have also been a part of his political thought.

Hatcher’s ideas of the ‘shastric imaginary’ and his suggestions on Rammohun’s writings on *Sati* are considered in greater detail in Chapter Five. The chapter will show that Rammohun consistently wrote against the practice of *Sati* and repeatedly cited the lack of governmental accountability on the issue and argued that the Company administration was guilty of wilfully neglecting the welfare of the victims. Rammohun’s argument for Company accountability was also related to ethics in contemporary Bengali society. To a Bengali audience, he argued that ethics was absolutely critical for

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<sup>49</sup> Brian A. Hatcher, ‘*Pandits at work: The modern Shastric imaginary in early colonial Bengal*’, in Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (eds.), *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, (Oxford, 2012), 45-6.

<sup>50</sup> Hatcher, ‘*Pandits at work*’, 51-4

<sup>51</sup> Hatcher, ‘*Pandits at work*’, 45-6.

any discussion on contemporary social practice. It also has implications for the accountability of the Company to Bengali society. This is because an ethical society had a much stronger case for holding the Company administration accountable than an unethical one.<sup>52</sup>

In chapter six, I argue that the most ambitious of his efforts to reach out to a European readership was his interpretation of the four Gospels in the New Testament.

Rammohun selectively and deliberately mis-interpreted the Gospels to make it appear as if it was in line with his political thought on societal ethics and governmental accountability. He also interpreted the four Gospels as a single text.

Rammohun argued that as the Gospels stressed on ethics and the importance of 'civil law' and were a 'guide to happiness'. He showed that the Gospels and Hindu scripture had 'a common basis' and that his ideas of ethics and law in Hindu scripture were not different from his interpretation of the Gospels' idea of the same.

Rammohun's writings on the Gospels were not sparse. As R. Sugirtharajah noted, Rammohun wrote more on the Gospels than he did on the *Vedānta*. But Sugirtharajah was at a loss to explain Rammohun's intense focus on the Gospels. I argue, that Rammohun wrote extensively on the Gospels, to highlight the reasonableness of his

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<sup>52</sup> On diacritical marks for *Sati*, I have followed the system adopted by Kathryn Hansen in her work on *Sati*. Hansen has adopted a system whereby all references to *Sati* without diacritical marks indicate the *practice* of widow burning, while *satī* (with the diacritical mark ī) refers to the female victim. Kathryn Hansen, 'Heroic Modes of Women in Indian Myth, Ritual and History' in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, eds. Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young (New York, ii, 1992), 55. Hansen notes that this system has also been adopted by other scholars who have worked on *Sati*; Sakuntala Narasimhan, *Sati: A Study of Widow Burning in India* (New Delhi, 1990) and *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*, eds. Arvind Sharma, Ajit Ray, Alaka Hejib and Katherine Young (Delhi, 1988).

arguments to his European readers, and show that his ideas were completely in agreement with what *they believed in*.

Rammohun's interpretation of the Bible were not a response to a wider global discourse of Christian thought but his own political project of governance and social ethics. He was deeply critical of Missionary ideas of Bengali society. His interpretation was shorn of any Biblical background but were a general argument for everyday ethical practice in contemporary Bengali society.

This thesis will argue that a unity of thought to Rammohun's political thought can be identified by considering the intellectual contexts behind some of his most important writings. We thus discover an underlying theory which underpinned his writings- a theory of ethics, accountability and distance, which sums up his political thought.

## Chapter one: Rammohun's assessment of the East India Company in Bengal, c.1831-2.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1830, Rammohun Roy embarked on a sea voyage from Calcutta to London. Rammohun had two objectives for travelling to London. First, to present a petition to George IV (r.1820-30) from the Mughal Emperor, Akbar II (r.1806-37) and second; to present the *Anti Suttee petition* to the House of Commons from the 'inhabitants of Calcutta'.<sup>53</sup> While at London, Rammohun also wrote about the Company's government in India. He focussed particularly on the judicial administration of the Company in Bengal. While the *Anti Suttee petition* is discussed in chapter five, Rammohun's ideas of the Company's government in London is the subject of this chapter.

In 1831, Rammohun presented his ideas of Company governance to the Select Committee of the House of Commons and published them the following year in a text titled *Exposition of the practical operations of Judicial and Revenue systems of India and of the general character and conditions of the native inhabitants as submitted in evidence to the authorities in England* (henceforth, *Exposition*).<sup>54</sup>

The purpose of the *Exposition* was to show that the natives of India had a role in their own governance and that the current system of administration did not take this into account. Rammohun argued that the Company's government could be made

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<sup>53</sup> Brajendranath Banerjee, *Rammohun Roy's Mission to England: Based on unpublished Records* (Calcutta, 1926), 1-23. By the time Rammohun reached London, a new King was on the throne, William IV (r. 1831-37).

<sup>54</sup> The full title of the text is *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India and of the general character and conditions of the native inhabitants as submitted in evidence to the authorities in England with notes and illustrations and also a brief preliminary sketch of the ancient and modern boundaries and of the history of that country* (London, 1832).

accountable to local centres of power (such as *Panchayats*) and the Bengali public instead of a distant and invisible Board of Control and Court of Directors at London. In this chapter I will argue that the *Exposition* can be read as source of Rammohun's political thought.

Historical works on Rammohun's writings in London have not however considered the *Exposition* from this perspective. This trend can be seen throughout modern scholarship. For example, in 1900, Rammohun's first modern biographer, Sophia Dobson Collet, referred to the *Exposition* but briefly and did not perceive it as a part of his political thought.<sup>55</sup> Subsequent revisions to Collet's work (published in 1914 and 1963 respectively) did not take it into account either.<sup>56</sup> In 1958, Iqbal Singh's biography did not perceive Rammohun's ideas of Company government as a part of his political thought but only as evidence on the agrarian context of Bengal.<sup>57</sup> In the 1980's Singh's revised biography did not consider any changes to this perspective. I argue that the ignorance of the *Exposition* has led to a historical dilemma. As Amiya Sen noted in 2012, 'scholars have remained undecided on whether Roy visualised a free India or remained a captive of the development chronology of the Empire'.<sup>58</sup> The argument of this chapter is an attempt to resolve this dilemma.

This chapter introduces a new interpretation of the *Exposition*. It is divided into four sections. The first section examines the context, readership and reception of the *Exposition*. The second focuses on the Introduction of the text. The third and fourth

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<sup>55</sup> Sophia Dobson Collet, *Life and Letters of Rammohun Roy*, Dilip Biswas ed. (Calcutta, 1963), 206.

<sup>56</sup> These editions are: Hemchandra Sarkar ed. (Calcutta, 1914) and Dilip Biswas ed. (Calcutta, 1963).

<sup>57</sup> Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy: A Biographical Inquiry into the Making of Modern India* (Bombay, 1958), i, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Amiya Sen, *Rammohun Roy: A Critical Biography* (Delhi, 2012), i.

sections explore the main arguments of the *Exposition* with a focus on judicial administration.<sup>59</sup>

## **Section one: The context, readership and reception of the *Exposition***

The *Exposition* retained the format of Rammohun's assessment of the Company to the Select Committee (i.e. the text was in the form of questions and answers) but also included new material such as an introduction, an index and an appendix to provide a context for readers. For example, William Blackstone's, *Commentaries on the laws of England* was probably included in the appendix because of its popularity in Britain.<sup>60</sup> As Michael Lobban observed, *Commentaries* was read and critiqued by legal theorists in the late-eighteenth century (such as William Jones) as well as in the early-nineteenth century (by Jeremy Bentham).<sup>61</sup>

Rammohun may have also quoted Blackstone because there were similarities in their arguments. We note that Blackstone 'attempted to reconcile local laws within an empirical framework' while Rammohun highlighted the relevance of local laws in Bengal within the larger context of Company administration.<sup>62</sup> This shows an attempt to explain the specificities of his argument using a reference which his readers in Britain would have been familiar with.

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<sup>59</sup> The pagination of the text shows that the judicial administration of the Company (1-55) concerned its author more than the other chapters, revenue administration (57-85) and the conditions of the everyday life of the natives of Bengal (101-11) respectively.

<sup>60</sup> The contemporary response to Blackstone was however mixed. While William Jones considered the *Commentaries* to be 'the most correct and beautiful outline that was ever exhibited in human science', Bentham criticised it for being incoherent. Michael Lobban, 'Blackstone and the science of the law', *The Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 317.

<sup>61</sup> Lobban, 'Blackstone and the science of the law', 311.

<sup>62</sup> Lobban, 'Blackstone and the science of the law', 317.

Rammohun's references to with *Commentaries* as a familiar text indicates his familiarity with the current political debates in London. As Lynn Zastoupil observed, Rammohun was personally acquainted with the MP's at the House of Commons and Lords. In March 1830, the Secretary of War (under the Whig government), Charles W. W. Wynn had presented a petition to the House of Commons which cited Rammohun's ideas.<sup>63</sup> Wynn had previously been the President of the Board of Control (1822-7) (under the Tory Government).<sup>64</sup> Since 1784, the Board of Control had been the parliamentary overseer of the affairs of the East India Company. Since Rammohun's assessments were published by the Select Committee as 'Communications *with the Board of Control*', it points to a degree of familiarity with his ideas in the highest decision making body of the East India Company. Wynn's petition to the Commons would have found at least one influential reader- the radical MP, Joseph Hume.

Hume was familiar with Rammohun's work. His personal papers included contemporary writings on Rammohun's assessment of salt tax, Sandfort Arnot's ideas of a free press in India (Arnot was Rammohun's collaborator at Calcutta and private secretary in London) and the Stamp Act (to which Rammohun was a signatory).<sup>65</sup> While there is no evidence that Hume responded to Rammohun's work, the presence of these writings indicates an intellectual interest in his political project. There was also an institutional context. Like Rammohun, Hume had also been associated with the East

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<sup>63</sup> University College London Library, London, [Hereafter UCL], Hume Tracts, 'Parliamentary debates on the East-Indians' petition presented by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Carlisle in the House of Lords and by the Rt. Hon. C.W. Williams Wynn in the House of Commons, the former on the 29th March and the latter on the 4th May 1830'.

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Escott, 'Wynn, Charles Watkin Williams (1775–1850)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30150, accessed 1 Dec 2014].

<sup>65</sup> UCL, Hume Tracts (1836), 'Remarks on the Salt Monopoly of Bengal and reports from the Board of Customs (Salt and Opium) of 1832', London, 1836. [Author not mentioned].



India Company (as interpreter of Indian languages in the Company's army in Madras and Bengal).<sup>66</sup>

Miles Taylor has argued that while not ideologically oriented towards any particular political discourse in India, Hume developed a radical political programme for institutional reform in Britain. The scope of his arguments extended to Company administration in India. Hume argued that long delays in courts and 'poor policing' had led to an expensive administrative system and proposed an amendment that 19 additional British member of Parliaments (MP's) be created for constituencies throughout the British Empire (including 4 for India).<sup>67</sup> Hume further suggested that 'all those eligible for jury duty' in these constituencies be allowed to vote to elect MP's. As Taylor noted, Hume's proposal brought together Tory supporters with the Radicals and showed 'how intertwined parliamentary reform had become with the government in India' (though the proposed amendment was defeated in Parliament.)<sup>68</sup> Rammohun's ideas of Company reform were similar to Hume's. Rammohun also criticised delays in courts and poor policing and argued that the current system of administration had led to unnecessary and wasteful expenditure.

Although the *Exposition* was written in the context of the Charter Renewal Act of 1833, the text found an audience and readership long after this period. In 1839, William Howitt, (the Quaker poet and author of a 'popular history' of native populations under

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<sup>66</sup> Taylor, Miles, 'Joseph Hume and the Reformation of India, 1819-33' in Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism 1550-1850* (Cambridge, 2007), 288.

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, 'Joseph Hume', 289.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, 'Joseph Hume', 185.

colonial governments) argued that Rammohun's conception of the absolute necessity of a free press for government to be accountable to the natives was correct.<sup>69</sup>

Howitt's intervention was not an isolated example. The same year, an anonymous tract on Company governance (authored by an untraceable 'AB' but found amongst Hume's personal papers) cited the *Exposition* and agreed with Rammohun that the Company needed to introduce more native employee posts in India.<sup>70</sup> AB and Rammohun shared similar ideas on governance. In an earlier tract, AB had argued that local judicial bodies in London should be given greater power since they were more effective in dispensing justice. This was similar to Rammohun's stress on local centres of judicial power in Bengal in the *Exposition*.<sup>71</sup>

The arguments of the *Exposition* were not however accepted unanimously. In 1840, George Thompson (secretary to the British India Association) delivered a speech at the Music Hall at Leeds and subsequently published it in *The Leeds Times* on 'The Present State of British India'. Subtitled, 'in reply to the *Edinburgh Review*', Thompson argued that the *Review* had falsely asserted that Rammohun's assessment of Company administration was defective.<sup>72</sup> To make his case, Thompson compared Rammohun's ideas of Company administration with that of John Shore's (Governor-General of Bengal, 1793-7 and close collaborator of Lord Cornwallis) and noted that their respective opinions of Company administration in Bengal were the same. Thompson

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<sup>69</sup> The John Rylands University Library, Manchester [hereafter JRL], *Wilson Anti-Slavery Collection*, Howitt, William, 'The English in India', London, 1839, 5.

<sup>70</sup> UCL, Hume Tracts, A.B., 'On the consequences of the probable changes of the renewal of the charter of the East India Company', London, 1833, 2.

<sup>71</sup> UCL, Hume Tracts, A.B., 'Letters demonstrating the benefits and conveniences of local courts for probate of wills in preference to concentration in London', London, 1834.

<sup>72</sup> JRL, *Wilson Anti-Slavery Collection*, Thompson, George, 'Present state of British India: Report of a Lecture', London, 1840, 7.

concluded that Rammohun's conception of the Company's government was not wrong.

Thompson's article shows that the readership of the *Exposition* was not confined to London. Perhaps the most remarkable case of the geographical reach (and longevity) of the *Exposition* was Francis Horsley Robinson's tract on the India Bill in 1853.

Robinson agreed with Rammohun that there was a severe shortage of administrative posts for qualified native officials in Company administration and argued that more posts should be allotted.<sup>73</sup> Robinson had previously been a Company official, having enrolled in the East India College in 1823 and retired as a member of the Board of Revenue in the Northwest Provinces in India in 1852.<sup>74</sup> His tract shows that the *Exposition* was also read by Company officials in India.

We can infer that the *Exposition* was a subject of debate and discussion by a wide readership of reformers, public intellectuals and former Company officials.

The question that arises here is, why was the *Exposition* so widely read? A possible reason could be that Rammohun's methods of explaining his argument was spectacularly successful. Nowhere is this more apparent than the introduction to the *Exposition*. The Introduction familiarised the reader with the subject matter of the text with a lucid and accessible narrative of India.

While historical works on narratives of the history, geography and culture of India by native intellectuals are seen primarily as a response to the 'colonial economy' and

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<sup>73</sup> University of Liverpool [henceforth UL], *Knowsley Pamphlet Collection*, Robinson, Francis Horsley, 'what good may come out of the India bill: or, notes of what has been, is, and may be, the government of India', 1853, 38.

<sup>74</sup> *The East India Registry and Directory for 1823* (London, 1823), xlv.

‘colonial ideology’ in the late nineteenth century, we note that Rammohun’s narrative did not refer to colonial economy or colonial ideology but was rather rooted in a specific early nineteenth century context of Company rule.<sup>75</sup> Rammohun referred to familiar contexts to engage readers. For example, the Introduction began with a specific context: the proposed Charter Renewal Act of 1833:

The Company’s charter was last renewed in 1813 and expires in 1833. [In this context] the authorities wished me also as a native of that country, to give evidence [which was then] printed. [However] I publish[ed] it for the purpose of prefixing these preliminary explanations [...].<sup>76</sup>

Rammohun thus made a clear reference to earlier versions of the text and cited his status as an invited speaker by the House of Commons to enhance the credibility of his argument in the Introduction of the *Exposition*. The content of the Introduction and the ways in which it was explained is the subject of the next section.

## **Section two: A History of India**

The Introduction of the *Exposition* attempted to familiarise readers with a distant and invisible India. India referred to two concepts- first, a supra-regional territory and second, an administrative system comprised of a union of states. Rammohun explained the geographical limits of India with familiar references with such as latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates. ‘India’, he explained:

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<sup>75</sup> Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago, 2004), 7-11. Goswami argues that discussions of India as a ‘geographically bonded space’ emerged as an important point of enquiry for late nineteenth century Indian political thinkers such as Dadbhai Naroji (1825-1917), Mahadev Ranade (1842-1901) and Romesh Dutt (1848-1909).

<sup>76</sup> *Exposition*, xvi

[...] lies between 8<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> degrees north latitude and 67<sup>th</sup> and 93<sup>d</sup> degrees east latitude.

The boundary mountains are interrupted on the east between 90 degrees and 91 degrees east latitude and 26 degrees and 27 degrees north latitude [and] the western boundary mountains in like manner at longitude 70 degrees east and latitude 34 degrees north.<sup>77</sup>

This description was substantiated with a map of India. The map proved that Rammohun's ideas of India could be verified with evidence.<sup>78</sup>

Although the boundaries of India were explained using familiar references, Rammohun argued that the Company did not create these boundaries. Rather their origin could be traced to the Early Indian period when 'India was anciently called *Bharat Varsha*'. This term was explained as follows:

'*Bhārat*' is a humane and powerful prince supposed to have sprung from the '*Indu-Bangs*' or lunar race. '*Varsha*' implies a large tract of continent cut off from other countries by natural boundaries such as oceans, mountains and deserts.<sup>79</sup>

Rammohun conceptualised *Bharat Varsha* from ancient myth but was careful not to alienate his readers. Hence the geographical boundaries of *Bharat Varsha* was explained with contemporary references:

[..] bounded on its south by the sea; on the east party by this sea and partly by ranges of mountains separating it by ancient China or rather countries now called Assam and Arrakan; on the north by a lofty and extensive chain of mountains that divides it from Tibet, on the west

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<sup>77</sup> *Exposition*, v-vii.

<sup>78</sup> It was also a development which was unprecedented. None of Rammohun earlier writings had included a map or references to maps.

<sup>79</sup> *Exposition*, v.

partly by ranges of mountains separating India from Persia and extending towards the western sea above the mountain of the Indus and above this mountain itself.<sup>80</sup>

Rammohun also stressed that his conception of *Bharat Varsha* was fairly well known in Early-Indian literature. For example, in the works of the fifth century Sanskrit playwright and poet Kalidasa:

‘In the north direction is situated the prince of mountains, the eternal Himalaya immersing both in eastern and western seas, stands on earth as a standard of measure (or line of demarcation)’.<sup>81</sup>

The narrative then shifted from a discussion of external boundaries to internal territories (‘tracts of land are separated from each other by rivers, or hills or some times by imaginary lines of demarcation’). Rammohun cited the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, authored by ‘Manu, the most ancient authority’ to have ‘defined [geographical] limits’ as his source.<sup>82</sup>

Rammohun argued that the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* divided the territories of *Bharat Varsha* as *Aryavarta* (‘land of the civilised people’ or lands which followed the caste system), *Brahmāvarta* (‘land of the gods’ or ‘land of sacred and civilised people’) and *Mleccha Desha* (‘barbarian countries’ or lands which did not follow the caste system).<sup>83</sup>

These territories were also explained in more familiar language. Not only could *Aryavarta* and *Brahmavarta* be cartographically located but the names themselves were in current circulation. For example, *Brahmavarta* could be located:

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<sup>80</sup> *Exposition*, viii.

<sup>81</sup> *Exposition*, VI.

<sup>82</sup> *Exposition*, vii-viii.

<sup>83</sup> *Exposition*, vii-viii.

[...] to the north of Delhi between the rivers Sarasvati and Dhrishadvati and extending from the banks of the Indus at 34 degrees north and 72 degrees 25 east in the south easterly direction along the foot of the Himalaya mountains and as far as 26 degrees 30 north and 87 degrees 30 east through Rajmahal, Bihar, the provinces of Allahabad, and of Malwa along the north side of Narmada almost to the west coast of India.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, *Aryavarta*:

[...] is situated between the eastern and the western coasts terminating towards the east at the mouth of the Ganges and about 22 degrees north and 87 degrees 30 east and on the west towards the mouth of the Indus at nearly 22 degrees north, 72 degrees 30 east comprehending the large province of Gujarat.<sup>85</sup>

*Mleccha Desha* was rather vaguely referred to as:

The countries situated beyond the limitations of civilised lands as above described whether mountains, valleys or low lands declared chiefly to have been inhabited by *Mlecchas* or barbarians and are therefore called barbarous countries. A country where the distinctions of the four classes, *Brahmins*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra* are not observed is known as *MIēccha Desha* or barbarous country.<sup>86</sup>

The limited attention to *Mleccha Desha* shows that Rammohun's focus was *Aryavarta* and *Brahmavarta*. This can be seen in Rammohun's critique of William Jones's translation of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*:

William Jones has translated: 'As far as the eastern and as far as the western oceans between the two mountains mentioned lies the tract which the wise have named *Aryavarta*'. This

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<sup>84</sup> *Exposition*, vii-viii.

<sup>85</sup> *Exposition*, vii-viii.

<sup>86</sup> *Exposition*, vii-viii.

rendered the description obscure if not completely unintelligible since the countries lying between these two ranges of mountains are scarcely situated between the eastern and western seas.<sup>87</sup>

This critique is crucial to Rammohun's interpretation of Indian history. It showed that his method of combining myth, classical literature, geography and history was an original reading of source material and not an interpretation of a current work of history. In this context, Rammohun introduced his concept of empire.

According to Rammohun, *Aryavarta* and *Brahmavarta* together contributed to a supra region- the empire. The 'empire' however did not refer to a single political unit but a cultural territory with common systems of rites, rituals and ceremonies. Rammohun highlighted the interface between rites, rituals, societal ceremonies and larger structures of political systems and political conflict and explained what legitimated political power in India:

Wide tracts of empire were [...] ruled by different princes who though politically independent and hostile to each other adhered to the same set of religious principles and commonly observed leading rites and rites and ceremonies taught in the Sanskrit language whether more or less refined.<sup>88</sup>

Rammohun's concept of a cultural territory was not restricted to India but also applied to Persia and China:

[...] countries [...] as far as 102 degrees east are by some authors considered to be a part of India though beyond its natural limits [93<sup>rd</sup> degrees east] and by European writers usually

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<sup>87</sup> *Exposition*, vii.

<sup>88</sup> *Exposition*, VI.



called 'India beyond the Ganges'. There, relics of Sanskrit literature and remains of Hindu temples are still found. [Similarly] countries beyond [...] Kabul and Kandahar are supposed by some to be included in India [since] many Hindu antiquities still exist there to corroborate the former notion.<sup>89</sup>

The emphasis on cultural territory did not however prevent a discussion of the failure of Early-Indian political traditions to form a common administrative system.

Rammohun took a bitter view of the warring principalities of the *Aryavarta* and *Brahmavarta* :

In consequence of the multiplied divisions and subdivisions of the land into separate and independent kingdoms under the authority of numerous princes hostile to each other and owing to the successive introduction of a vast number of castes and sects destroying every texture of social and political unity, the country was at different periods invaded and brought under temporary subjection to foreign princes celebrated for power and ambition.<sup>90</sup>

Rammohun focused on the political-administrative aspect of empire and argued that a political union of territories constituted a strong state.<sup>91</sup> This was explained with reference to England:

Compare the feeble state of Persia when ruled by several independent princes with the formidable power she enjoyed when consolidated under the empire of *Saffi* [(?) Saffavid Empire 1501-1722]. Direct your attention to a still nearer country: I mean England and

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<sup>89</sup> *Exposition*, vii.

<sup>90</sup> *Exposition*, viii.

<sup>91</sup> As the third chapter will further elaborate, Rammohun's argument that 'a vast number of castes and sects' contributed to social conflict were developed in great detail for his readership at Calcutta and Murshidabad.

compare the consequences formerly arising from her divided resources and the present state of elevation under the subsisting union.<sup>92</sup>

Thus Rammohun's theory was that all effective governments are *large* political unions. In the case of Indian political history, Rammohun argued that where Early-Indian polities had failed to create a large administrative network and a strong political union, later governments would succeed. The process would however be preceded by centuries of conflict:

[...] 900 years ago Mohammedan princes advancing by the northwest [...] succeeded in conquering [...] India. Their rule was transferred in succession from one dynasty of conquerors to another (Ghazni, Ghor, and Afghan) till 1525 of the Christian era when Prince Babur a descendent of Timur (or Timurlane) in the fifth generation established his throne [at Delhi], the centre of Hindustan.<sup>93</sup>

We note that, Delhi is not 'the centre of Hindustan' from a geographical point of view but is termed so because it corresponds to the region of *Brahmavarta* ('the land of the gods'). The establishment of the Mughal throne in 1526 in the 'centre of Hindustan' thus highlighted a case for continuity from Early-India.

Babur's Mughal dynasty oversaw the establishment of a politico-administrative system of the empire in India. Rammohun explained the political significance of this development in terms of a new political language of sovereignty that emerged from the establishment of Mughal rule. Rammohun perceived the Mughals as *the* sovereign

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<sup>92</sup>*Exposition*, vii.

<sup>93</sup>*Exposition*, ix.

political power in the history of India (and no other political dynasty was conceptualised the same):

[...] The Mughal dynasty exercised the uncontrolled sovereignty of the empire for nearly two centuries (with the exception of sixteen years) under a variety of changes according to the rise or the decrease of their power. The empire may be said consisting of the following twenty provinces: Delhi, Lahore, Kashmir, Kabul, Kandahar , Agra, Gujarat, Ajmer, Multan, Oudh, Allahabad, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Malwa, Khandesh, Berar, Aurangabad, Golconda [and] Bijapur.<sup>94</sup>

We note that the twenty provinces of the Mughal Empire included *Aryavarta*, *Brahmavarta* and *Mleccha Desha*. Additionally, the provinces of Kabul and Kandahar correspond to Rammohun's earlier ideas of contested cultural territories in northwest India. This showed the Mughal Empire as a remarkable case of historical continuity which can be traced to Early- Indian political traditions.

Rammohun's assessment of the Mughals was not however celebratory. He argued that the Mughal system of government was disproportionately affected by its emperors. This led to political instability. He bitterly noted that from 1712 'the star of Mughal ascendancy inclined towards descent':<sup>95</sup>

The Mughal princes from 1712 [...] oftener consulted their own personal comfort than welfare of the state and relied for success on the fame of their dynasty than on sound policy and military valour. Not only their crowns but their lives also depended upon the good will of the

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<sup>94</sup>*Exposition*, ix.

<sup>95</sup> *Exposition*, ix.

nobles who virtually assumed sovereign power and each sought his own individual aggrandizement.

The year 1712 marks the date from which the Mughal emperors were more influenced by nobles than their own acumen. According to Satish Chandra, the period from 1713 onwards was dominated by a series of 'king-makers'.<sup>96</sup>

In context we note that Rammohun argued that the political sovereignty of the Mughals was 'assumed' by 'nobles' as a politically opportunistic response to declining Mughal power than an attempt to introduce new ideas of welfare, policy, administration and governance. Consequently post-Mughal governments were governments of misrule and political instability. Also, since Mughal rule was emperor centric, Rammohun implied that the exercise of sovereign power by 'the nobles' was illegitimate:

[...] all the southern and eastern as well as the western provinces of the empire [...] gradually fell into the hands of the English. Those territories were in fact transferred to British possession from the rule of a number of rebellious nobility. The army they employed chiefly consisted of the natives of India a country in which patriotism has never made its way.<sup>97</sup>

Rammohun did not explain his use of the term 'patriotism'. The use of the term had implications for his British readers. According to Jonathan Parry, patriotism was a familiar political term in London in 1830's. It referred to 'British attitudes towards political developments in Europe such as the Franco-Prussian War'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1710-1740* (Delhi, 1972), 86.

<sup>97</sup> *Exposition*, x.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), 49-50.

According to Parry, 'patriotism' also gained currency amongst the Whigs and Tories in debates on 'national identity' in newspapers, weekly journals and popular literature. The term was used to address the public sphere in Britain.

The question that arises here, was Rammohun referring to a lack of patriotism in India, or the public sphere? As far as patriotism is concerned, Christopher Bayly showed that ideas of patriotism were articulated in works on ethics, morality, good government and political debates in pre-colonial India and 'well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>99</sup> Thus Rammohun was probably criticising the public sphere in India.<sup>100</sup> This criticism took shape in a discussion on the Company and Ranjit Singh in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ranjit Singh, though a Sikh ruler, followed Mughal systems of government. Rammohun argued that Ranjit Singh had captured the Northern Provinces of the former Mughal Empire:

[..] The greatest part of the Northern provinces beyond the river Sutlej had fallen into the hands of Ranjit Singh the chief of a tribe called the *Sikhs*. Ranjit Singh, sovereign of north western India (consisting of Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and Eastern Kabul) is considered highly gifted with prudence and moderation and apparently inclined towards liberal principles [...].<sup>101</sup>

Ranjit Singh's government was explained with familiar a reference- 'inclined towards liberal principles'.<sup>102</sup> Rammohun's description of Singh's government was however an assessment of Mughal systems of rule: the absence of a politically informed public

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<sup>99</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1998), 14.

<sup>100</sup> The concept of the 'public' and the 'public sphere' in recent historiography is referred to in detail in Chapter three. This is because chapter three is mainly concerned with the public sphere in early-nineteenth century Bengal.

<sup>101</sup> *Exposition*, x.

<sup>102</sup> *Exposition*, x.

sphere ('arbitrary rule'), a system of government based on an active, visible and accessible rulers ('conciliatory system of government').<sup>103</sup> The accessibility and visibility of Ranjit Singh was indicated by assessments such as his 'affability in private intercourse' and a 'judicious discharge of public duties'.<sup>104</sup> To Rammohun, these were not mere social attributes but established Singh as a local ruler who was not dependent on his administration to inform him of the conditions of his inhabitants and the political and economic implications of his policies. The references to local and visible forms of political power would feature as important points of criticism of the Company's government in the main text of the *Exposition*.

The final section of the Introduction comprised of an outline of the political history of the Company in India:

[...] The Honourable East India Company first obtained their charter of privileges in 1600 [...] to carry on trade with the East Indies. [Their] conquests [in India] commence[d] about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [and succeeded because of] the ignorance existing in the east of the modern improvements in the art of war combined with the powerful assistance afforded to the Company by the naval and military forces of the crown by England.<sup>105</sup>

Rammohun argued that the Company was a *commercial* (rather than *political*) organisation in India which was invested with military power from England. The Company's main concern was to 'manage territorial possessions in India' and maintain commercial privileges. To achieve *this* end, officials ('generally relations and friends of the Directors') were 'sent out' to rule the territories in India.<sup>106</sup> The Company's

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<sup>103</sup> *Exposition*, x.

<sup>104</sup> *Exposition*, x.

<sup>105</sup> *Exposition*, xi.

<sup>106</sup> *Exposition*, xii.

commercial status led to a narrow interpretation of administration and eventual misgovernance of its territories in India. At this point however, Rammohun introduced a new political factor in his narrative:

The government of England [(?) 1765] received frequent intimations of the questionable character by which their acquisitions had been obtained and conquests achieved and of the abuse of power committed [...] and the impression in consequence was that the immense or rather incalculable distance between England and India impede[d] intercourse between the natives of the two countries and the absence of an efficient local check on the exercise of power of the Company's executive officers as well as the hope of support from their influential employers in England [led] many of them to the neglect or violate their duties and bring reproach to the national character.<sup>107</sup>

Our earlier reference to 'patriotism' as a contemporary discourse on national identity in Britain can be seen in the context of the officials of the Company being 'a reproach on 'national character'. Also, by emphasising the contribution of a distant and invisible London to the misgovernance of the Company in Bengal, Rammohun directed attention to the importance of local centres of power in Bengal itself. For example, when read against his account of the Ranjit Singh's contemporary government, Rammohun's emphasis on 'local checks of power', 'lack of support from employers in England' and 'incalculable distance impeding intercourse between the natives of the two countries' turn out to be a criticism of misgovernance by the Company.

According to Rammohun, misgovernance by the Company had led to parliamentary supervision of Company affairs under the Regulating Act of 1773. The internal

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<sup>107</sup> *Exposition*, xii.

administration of the Company in India was now divided into three large administrative units (Presidencies) in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Rammohun's narrative did not however end with the Regulating Act. The process by which London intervened from 1765-1773 represented but the first phase of governance from London.

The second phase began in 1784 with the formation of the Board of Commissioners in London. Rammohun argued that the Board was a *political* body.<sup>108</sup> The 'commercial' Company was now accountable to the Board for its policies. Rammohun further argued that the Board instituted a system of governance from 1784-92:

The system of rule acted upon in India [...] was of a mixed nature- European and Asiatic. The established usages of the country were adopted for the most part as a model of their conduct in the discharge of political, revenue and judicial functions with modifications at the discretion of local authority.<sup>109</sup>

The Board thus continued Indian political traditions. This period also oversaw Charles Cornwallis' first appointment as Governor-General in Bengal.<sup>110</sup> Cornwallis consolidated the Company's administration in Bengal.<sup>111</sup>

Rammohun perceived the introduction of Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement in 1793 as the third phase of Company governance. He opined that the Permanent Settlement completely restructured the internal administration of the Company in Bengal through 'changes in every department, particularly the revenue and the judicial systems'.<sup>112</sup> At

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<sup>108</sup> *Exposition*, xii.

<sup>109</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.

<sup>110</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.

<sup>111</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.

<sup>112</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.



a macro level. The Permanent Settlement broke away from earlier systems of governance and introduced a new system of administration 'approximating to institutions in England' than earlier systems of administration in India.<sup>113</sup>

The question of the legitimacy of the Permanent Settlement to introduce such sweeping changes is important in this context. Rammohun argued that the Mughal Emperor Akbar II was the legitimate 'heir' to the empire and its system of administration. Since the Company did not possess any political sovereignty in India, and had introduced settlements without consulting the Mughal crown, it followed that the Company's actions were open to criticism.<sup>114</sup> By contrast, Rammohun assessed the system of Company government which preceded the Permanent Settlement and continued Indian political traditions more favourably. The Introduction to the *Exposition* ended here.

Rammohun's narrative of history set the context for his ideas on Company governance and outlined his conception of Indian political traditions. His argument that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 represented a sharp break from earlier systems of rule in India will be explored further in the next section.

### **Section three: Problems and Consequences of the Permanent Settlement (1793-1830): the Judiciary in Bengal**

The Permanent Settlement was the most important theme of discussion in the *Exposition*. According to Rammohun, success of the Permanent Settlement depended on the successful implementation of the judicial institutions in Bengal which

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<sup>113</sup> *Exposition*, xiv.

<sup>114</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.

‘approximated to institutions in England’. Consequently, the failure to implement such ‘institutions’ in India figured heavily in his criticism of the Permanent Settlement.

Rammohun argued that the Company followed contradictory policies in judicial administration. Although in theory, the Permanent Settlement had bypassed Indian systems of governance; in practice, the Company still followed policies of Mughal judicial procedure in everyday administration. For example, the official language of the court was Persian. Rammohun argued that holding court proceedings in Persian was an impractical and problematic imitation of Mughal court traditions since few judges and very few of the general native population understood Persian.<sup>115</sup> He opined that practices such as these led to excessive delays throughout the judicial hierarchy in Bengal from the *Sudder* [Supreme civil court] to the district courts, native corruption, perjury and forgery of court documents.<sup>116</sup>

For heuristic purposes, ‘district courts’ courts are referred here as the ‘lower courts’, while the *Sudder*, Nizamat courts at Calcutta as well as Provincial courts of appeal at Calcutta, Dhaka, Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Patna and Bareilly as ‘higher courts’. This division highlights the districts as the focus of Rammohun’s assessment of the judicial system of Bengal.

The *Exposition* identified three basic problems of the Permanent Settlement. Firstly, an insufficient number of courts in Bengal. Secondly, a defective system of organisation of court documents and investigations (‘dispatch’) throughout the judiciary and thirdly,

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<sup>115</sup> *Exposition*, 7.

<sup>116</sup> *Exposition*, 6.

the excessive dependence of judges on underpaid and unregulated native employees particularly in the districts.<sup>117</sup>

Rammohun argued that the lack of courts in the districts ('interior') led to problems in accessibility for the 'poorer classes' whose expenses of travel to 'vast distances' to seek judicial intervention disadvantaged their position to 'wealthier neighbours'.<sup>118</sup>

Rammohun instead outlined a new system of localisation of judicial power which would involve a restructuring of the ways in which the judicial system was currently organised with an increase in the number of courts located near the 'populous parts of town' and where cases could be decided without being hampered by geographical distance.<sup>119</sup>

The *Exposition* also identified organisational problems in the investigation of judicial suits. Rammohun noted that the *Sudder* (Supreme) Courts' investigation of judicial cases 'at a distance of more than fifty miles' led to long delays and a glut of cases. This could be avoided if Circuit court judges were 'directed and relied on' to conduct judicial investigations and thereby 'save useless expense'.<sup>120</sup>

Rammohun asserted that the reorganisation of the judiciary with greater administrative responsibilities delegated to the interior and greater powers of the *Sudder* courts would not create the kind of problems of accessibility that the current system had. In this context, he argued that *Sudder* Courts, though organised on the system of 'English Courts', were not accorded the powers of the judiciary in England.

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<sup>117</sup>*Exposition*, 3.

<sup>118</sup>*Exposition*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Exposition*, 6.

<sup>120</sup>*Exposition*, 26.

For example, the writ of *habeas corpus* in the *Sudder* would have been ‘highly desirable’ but had not been introduced. The significance of this observation would not have been lost to his readership in Britain.<sup>121</sup>

From a discussion of the organisation of the judiciary, the argument shifted to the system of officials and judges of the courts and the problems they faced in their everyday tasks. Rammohun opined that the main problem in Company courts was that judges and the inhabitants had ‘no common language’. Since judges could rarely interpret the ‘real nature of grievances’ it led to ‘decisions founded on conjecture and liable to error’.<sup>122</sup> This led to an administrative system whose documents were produced in a ‘language foreign to them’. The *Exposition* also explained this problem with reference to the judicial institutions of England. Quoting William Blackstone, Rammohun noted that judges in England were required to be conversant in the language of the petitioners to the court since unfamiliarity in this regard led to defective judicial decisions. He added that according to Blackstone, ‘subordinate courts’ in England were particularly vulnerable to this problem.<sup>123</sup>

Rammohun argued that the judicial administration in Bengal also depended ‘greatly’ on native officials.<sup>124</sup> Native officials read and wrote bills, depositions, abstracts of cases of petitions and performed miscellaneous clerical work for the judges throughout the judicial administration from the *Sudder* to the *Zillah* Courts.<sup>125</sup> In civil

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<sup>121</sup> *Exposition*, 26.

<sup>122</sup> *Exposition*, 3.

<sup>123</sup> *Exposition*, 114.

<sup>124</sup> *Exposition*, 39.

<sup>125</sup> *Exposition*, 9.

courts, native officials could try cases on land and 'moveable property' worth up to 500 rupees. The role of the native official was not restricted to civil courts. Rammohun opined that, 'for the past forty years (1791-1831)' native officials (*Muftis*) had had an important role in the criminal [*Nizamat Adalat*] courts by their knowledge of criminal law:<sup>126</sup>

In a vague sense the *Muftis* may be considered as analogous to the jury in the English courts while the European judicial officer is the judge. Both [the judge and the native law assessor] take cognizance of the charges brought before the magistrates and sent to the court [and] both hear the evidence and *examine* the witnesses and both give their voice in passing the decision.<sup>127</sup>

Rammohun's critique of Company administration was directed at a specific *policy* of the Permanent Settlement namely that the judicial system in Bengal had *created* an ambiguous and unregulated native judicial service.

Rammohun argued that the Company's judicial policy was defective since it had led to a general lack of 'control and discipline' amongst the native judicial service. The current policy compelled inhabitants to cultivate a 'friendly relations' with native officials to get their work done. From routine clerical tasks (such as issuing a stamp for a bill and checking documents) to issuing summons and subpoenas and finally cases of serious fraud (perjury and forgery), the native officials demand for 'pre-requisites' from the inhabitants of Bengal was the 'main cause of obstruction of the judicial

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<sup>126</sup> *Exposition*, 39.

<sup>127</sup> *Exposition*, 40. The question of the native official as a member of the jury will be taken up in section four.

businesses'.<sup>128</sup> This problem was serious enough to 'defeat' the purpose of the judicial system itself.<sup>129</sup>

Rammohun's assessment was not that native officials were unsuitable. He noted that native officials 'in point of rank and pay' were 'meanly situated' in the judicial hierarchy and was sympathetic to the native officials:<sup>130</sup>

[...]considering the trifling salaries and extent of the power which native officers possess [...] it is to be expected that [...] many of them should [...] avail themselves of their official influence to promote their own interests.<sup>131</sup>

In this context, Rammohun's discussion of native corruption pointed to the larger concern of his project: a re-evaluation of the role of the Company official in the districts.

[...] to show how much the vigilance and activity of a public officer may accomplish even in so extensive a district as Hooghly I may mention that under D.C. Smith every case is decided in the course of four, five or six months. In the courts of appeal the causes pending are very numerous. Conscientious and active as Mr. Smith is, he is often obliged by the pressure of business, judicial and magisterial to authorise his native judicial officers to take depositions of witnesses in civil courts.<sup>132</sup>

D.C. Smith's judicial administration is presented as a case of the Company's official's court. Both civil and criminal cases took up to four years to resolve in the district courts

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<sup>128</sup> *Exposition*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> *Exposition*, 31.

<sup>130</sup> *Exposition*, 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Exposition*, 11.

<sup>132</sup> *Exposition*, 31.

and up to five years in the *Sudder* (Supreme) courts.<sup>133</sup> Further, appeals of cases worth more than 50,000 rupees were sent to the King's court of appeal at London. Often, judgements were pronounced on translations which turned out to be defective.<sup>134</sup> This led to more delays.

Rammohun suggested a number of changes to Company policy (but within the framework of the Regulation IV of 1793 and 'with due regard to economy' or expenditure for the Company).<sup>135</sup>

A system of checks and balances was structured into Rammohun's proposed system. At the core of his suggestions was a better paid native official who was monitored and supervised by Company officials such as the judicial secretary, the judge and the head writer.<sup>136</sup> The head writer was particularly important. Rammohun proposed that the head writer's salary be increased and made personally responsible for the failure to regulate native corruption. The head writer would be accountable to a native clerk (also called 'superintendent of the papers').

The clerk maintained a separate register to record the time taken for cases to be resolved (so that 'no delay takes place').<sup>137</sup> The register also showed the times which the judges attended and held court and recorded their reasons for absence.

Misconduct by the judge was to be reported by the clerk to the immediate higher

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<sup>133</sup> *Exposition*, 30.

<sup>134</sup> *Exposition*, 30.

<sup>135</sup> *Exposition*, 34.

<sup>136</sup> *Exposition*, 34.

<sup>137</sup> *Exposition*, 34.

court. A failure to report misconduct could result in the clerk being dismissed from his post.<sup>138</sup>

Rammohun's proposals were a response to a specific context. He argued that the judges of Bengal were not accountable for their tasks in the current system. This led to problems of delay in judicial administration. The situation was particularly dire in lower courts<sup>139</sup> where (unlike the higher courts) native officials were not selected 'carefully' and 'held in a state of much dependence by judges which incapacitated them from standing up firmly'.<sup>140</sup> Taking the example of the native pleaders, Rammohun argued that:

[..] the native pleaders are so unfortunately situated from their being such a great distance between them and the judges who belong to the rulers of the country, and from not being of the same profession nor of the same class as the judges, and having no prospect of promotion as English barristers have, that they are treated as an inferior *caste* of persons (emphasis in original).<sup>141</sup>

Rammohun's use of the term 'inferior caste' of the native officials was a reference to a *dysfunctional* judicial hierarchy which had been primarily constructed by Company officials (who are referred as 'rulers'). It also highlighted the Permanent Settlement's failure to introduce reforms for native officials to have similar roles in the judiciary as their (identified) counterparts in Britain: barristers.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Exposition*, 34.

<sup>139</sup> *Exposition*, 11.

<sup>140</sup> *Exposition*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> *Exposition*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> *Exposition*, 8.



In this context, Rammohun noted that the judicial system did not lack capable native officials:

There are natives of the country empowered to decide causes of any description. There are native *Munsifs* or commissioners for the decision of small debts and *Sudder Aumeens* who are authorised to try causes under five hundred rupees whether connected with landed or moveable property. Many of them are fully qualified and if proper care can be taken in the selection all of the situations may be filled with well qualified persons.<sup>143</sup>

The problem therefore lay with the inability of judges in the lower court to appoint experienced and capable native officials. Rammohun's discussion of the abilities of judges marked an important turning point in the *Exposition*. So far, his discussion had been limited to the judicial administration of Bengal. Now, Rammohun shifted to a broader context: The impact of colonial policy on administration in India. This context, he argued, 'merits the deepest consideration of the legislature' (House of Commons).<sup>144</sup>

Rammohun argued that the Company's policy of sending judges to India at a young age was a faulty one. The Company's defence was that civil servants acquired a knowledge of new languages easier at a very young age. In response, Rammohun compared the recruitment policy of the Company to that of Christian missionaries and observed that missionaries though sent out to India 'at a mature age of 25-35 years' nevertheless gained linguistic skills in two or three years. Their knowledge of Indian languages was not to do with their age but 'free communication with people'.<sup>145</sup> In this context, he

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<sup>143</sup>*Exposition*, 10.

<sup>144</sup>*Exposition*, 45.

<sup>145</sup>*Exposition*, 46.

suggested that 'no civil servant should be sent to India under 24 or at least 22 years of age'.<sup>146</sup> Further, the Company's decision to send very young men to India also led to other problems such as an 'indiscreet choice of native officers from youthful partialities and thoughtless habits [monetary debt] acquired in the early days amid power and influence [which] prove very injurious to the [native] community'.<sup>147</sup>

Rammohun argued that prior to sailing for India, prospective judges ought to qualify as lawyers and produce 'a certificate from an English professor of law' proving their competence such that 'the knowledge of the principles of jurisprudence as developed in one system will enable him to acquire more readily any other system'.<sup>148</sup> This would lead to a greater number of 'accurate decisions' and thus 'little need of appeals to revise decisions'.<sup>149</sup> In this context, the *Exposition* quoted Blackstone's assertion that a judicial system which did not have qualified judges would only but bring 'contempt on itself'.<sup>150</sup>

Rammohun also assessed the working of the appeals court at London and argued that it ought to be re-located to Calcutta. He argued that such local centres of judicial power would not only take less time (a maximum of one year was suggested) and but also provide better translated documents. New posts of native officers to assist in translations were to be created. The salaries for these posts would be paid from a fee

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<sup>146</sup>*Exposition*, 45.

<sup>147</sup>*Exposition*, 47.

<sup>148</sup> *Exposition*, 48

<sup>149</sup>*Exposition*, 48.

<sup>150</sup>*Exposition*, 114.

by interested parties as a part of the appeals process.<sup>151</sup> (The non-payment of the fee would result in the appeal being quashed.)

Rammohun's final suggestion was regarding the lack of judicial accountability to the public. He suggested that court proceedings should be accessible to the public and that 'anyone should have the right to make notes and publish the same'.<sup>152</sup> This meant that court decisions could be debated and critiqued in newspapers and journals.

Rammohun added however that 'intentional errors that could be judicially proved should be subject to prosecution and liable to penalty' to prevent misuse.<sup>153</sup>

Rammohun's suggestions were a response to the problems of *the original system of the Permanent Settlement*. In 1830 however, the Company changed the basic premise of the Permanent Settlement by combining the positions of the revenue collector and the magistrate into a single post- the revenue commissioner.<sup>154</sup> Rammohun's assessment of the new changes introduced by the Company is the subject of the next section.

#### **Section four: The Response to 1830- A restructuring of the judicial administration of Bengal**

Rammohun's response to the Company's changes in 1830 can be seen from his critique of the role of the judges in provincial courts. Under the Permanent Settlement,

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<sup>151</sup> Rammohun observed that from his own experience with translations of official documents from an 'oriental tongue and provincial language' to 'a European language' that 'unless a translator be assisted by persons possessing peculiar vernacular knowledge of various localities', translations would be inaccurate and judicial decisions rendered faulty. *Exposition*, 37.

<sup>152</sup> *Exposition*, 35.

<sup>153</sup> *Exposition*, 35.

<sup>154</sup> *Exposition*, 29.

provincial court judges had been judges of Circuit. This made them an important intermediary between *Sudder* and district courts. Their duties in circuit did not however cause any delays in the daily proceedings of provincial courts since there was always one judge 'in station' for every two on circuit.<sup>155</sup>

While on circuit, provincial court judges presided over cases involving the death penalty, life imprisonment as well as the general 'law and order' in districts.<sup>156</sup> In this context, Rammohun argued that the administration of circuit courts while modelled on the 'English system' was significantly altered due to a lack of jurors. In the Bengali context this was particularly problematic since jurors could have been involved in important tasks such as cross *examining* witnesses and 'detecting false evidence' due to their familiarity with the local context- dialect and society.<sup>157</sup>

In 1830, the Company introduced a change to the system of circuit courts (Henceforth referred as '1830 measures'). This change merged the revenue and the judicial service and thus undid an important aspect of the Permanent Settlement ('one of the leading principles of Lord Cornwallis').<sup>158</sup>

Rammohun then described the specific policies of the 1830 measures that he disagreed with. He noted that a new administrative position 'revenue commissioner' had been created to take over the role of the Judges and revenue collector. Revenue Commissioners communicated with the Board of Revenue at Calcutta (now renamed

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<sup>155</sup>*Exposition*, 27.

<sup>156</sup>*Exposition*, 27.

<sup>157</sup> *Exposition*, 27.

<sup>158</sup>*Exposition*, 29.

*Sudder* court) instead of the *Sudder Dewani Adalat* as an appeals court for all civil cases.

This post created problems throughout the administration. While at Calcutta, the lack of experience of the *Sudder* Court with judicial matters led to frequent delays and instances of ‘appeals going twice over’; in the districts, the 1830 measures created problems for the Company-men because they had trained for careers in either revenue or judicial service but not both.<sup>159</sup> As Rammohun put it, ‘[Company men] may now be appointed to discharge the highest judicial duties who never before tried the most trivial cause and another to superintend the collectors of revenue to whose duties he is a stranger’.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the consequence of revenue collectors going on circuit was that it hampered court affairs and revenue collection.<sup>161</sup>

The 1830 measures also contradicted Pre-British (*‘Mohameddan’*) systems of administration in Bengal in which ‘no judge or judicial officer empowered to try capital crimes was ever a collector of revenue’.<sup>162</sup> Rammohun’s critique strongly implied that the Company should reinstate the Permanent Settlements’ policy of separating revenue from judicial duties.

Rammohun’s suggestions also took into account recent changes in the employment of native officials in judicial administration and expanded the scope of these changes. For example, under William Bentinck’s administration (1828-33), higher administrative posts such as that of Principal *Sudder Aumeens* and Deputy Collectors of districts had

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<sup>159</sup>*Exposition*, 38.

<sup>160</sup>*Exposition*, 29.

<sup>161</sup> *Exposition*, 28

<sup>162</sup>*Exposition*, 28.

been allotted to native officials.<sup>163</sup> (This was contradictory to Cornwallis's regulations of 1793 which excluded all officials from higher administrative posts.)<sup>164</sup> In this context, Rammohun suggested changes to the post of *Sudder Aumeen* and the creation of a new position, the Assistant Judge.

The *Sudder Aumeen* was a crucial to Rammohun's argument about the suitability of native officials for higher posts. His discussion on the administrative responsibilities of this post also articulate his ideas about judicial accountability and accessibility.

Under the current system, *Sudder Aumeens* ('superior commissioners') were native officials who tried civil cases of up to 500 rupees. *Sudder Aumeens* did not try cases at the first instance but only when cases were 'turned over' to them at the 'discretion' of the *Zillah* Judge.<sup>165</sup> Rammohun argued that the office of the *Sudder Aumeen* did not solve the problems of distance for the natives. The natives were still required to travel '60-80-miles' to the court. Rammohun argued that the problem could be solved if *Sudder Aumeens* were stationed at 'proportionate distances' instead of the same court as the *Zillah* Judge.<sup>166</sup>

This suggestion also however led to a problem. Rammohun noted that *Sudder Aumeens* being stationed outside *Zillah* Courts would be subject to similar problems as the native judicial service.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: The Making of a Liberal Imperialist 1774-1839* (Sussex, 1974), 265. For a broader view of this policy on the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century India see Hugh Tinker, *South Asia: A Short History* (London, 1966), 153.

<sup>164</sup> Rosselli, *Bentinck*, 266.

<sup>165</sup> *Exposition*, 17.

<sup>166</sup> *Exposition*, 17.

<sup>167</sup> Section Two of this chapter is based on this subject.

To introduce a degree of regulation, Rammohun suggested that a new position of Assistant Judges be created to ‘personally superintend’ the *Sudder Aumeens*.<sup>168</sup> The Assistant Judge would be responsible for appeals on civil cases in the *Zillah*. Their salaries would not however create any extra expenditure for the Company. This is because Assistant Judges would be paid from the proceeds of the duties they performed on land registration (in which all land deeds would require to be presented to the court and registered for a fee.) This was a development of the Permanent Settlement regulations. Under the act of 1793, land registration had been optional but it could now be made compulsory.<sup>169</sup>

We note that the Assistants Judge’s role was also similar to that of the Provincial Judge under the Permanent Settlement. Under Rammohun’s proposed system, two Assistant Judges would be appointed for every district. While one would remain ‘in station’ at the *Zillah* court, the other would be in charge of presiding over the work of the *Sudder Aumeens* and native officers. This new role would reduce delays in the *Zillah* court. Only in cases of a difference in opinion would the appeal be forwarded to the *Zillah* court judge.

The Assistant Judge’s role extended beyond the administrative tasks of the courts. They could receive complaints against police officers in the districts and forward the same to the magistrates since ‘poor peasants’ and villagers were unable to leave their travel large distances to the *Zillah* courts to seek redress.<sup>170</sup> This new role meant that

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<sup>168</sup> *Exposition*, 18.

<sup>169</sup> *Exposition*, 19.

<sup>170</sup> *Exposition*, 20.

the Judiciary would have a greater engagement with the public than had been the case previously.

The Assistant Judge would also be assisted by a native official ('assessor') appointed by the *Sudder Dewani Adalat* to check documents and verify their contents.<sup>171</sup> Native assessors were also to be appointed 'for life' and paid high salaries of 300-400 rupees per month.<sup>172</sup> The native assessor was a powerful post as there was also no official within the judiciary to act as a check on his power.

In this context, Rammohun suggested that an important check on the native assessor was a greater involvement of the Bengali public in the judicial process. The role of the inhabitants would be as members of the jury in a restructured *Panchayat* system in Bengal. Trial by jury was also a solution to the generic problem of an excessive dependence on native officials for judicial administration. In Rammohun's estimation, the Bengali public was 'assuredly qualified' to be jurors. He argued that 'a trial by jury' was an effectual check against corruption and suggested that jurors may be selected from 'retired pleaders, retired native officers and agents employed by private individuals ('mukhtars')' since they were familiar with Company judicial regulations and procedure.<sup>173</sup>

To further explain his suggestion of a jury, Rammohun drew parallels between the *Panchayat* and the British jury system and argued that the 'principle' of a jury 'with certain modifications' was not unfamiliar to the *Panchayat*. However the *Panchayat*

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<sup>171</sup>*Exposition*, 18.

<sup>172</sup>*Exposition*, 15.

<sup>173</sup>*Exposition*, 22-4.



system also had problems.<sup>174</sup> Unlike 'former times' the *Panchayat* was not delegated to try cases by the administration. The irregularity of *Panchayat* members, the susceptibility to 'partiality' and 'private influence' in taking decisions, the absence of a judge to 'direct and preside' over meetings and the lack of power of the *Panchayat* itself (such as that of 'compelling' witnesses to attend and give evidence without a court order) had led to an ineffective system.<sup>175</sup> In this context, Rammohun suggested that a joint native judge and a European judge should be appointed to direct the proceedings of a *Panchayat*.

The problem of 'private influence' could be resolved if a *Panchayat* was chosen by the judges. *Panchayat* members would also be jury members who advised the judge on all civil cases. Rammohun outlined a suggested procedure that could be followed in this regard. A general list of jurors would be drawn up by judges from which 'thrice' the required number of jurors would be summoned. A lottery would then decide the final jury. Jurors who had any stake in the suit would be excluded from the final list of jury members.<sup>176</sup>

Rammohun suggested that court proceedings would be held in Bengali ('vernacular dialect') instead of Persian to ensure a wide membership of jurors. Natives could familiarise themselves with the judicial process by having access to Bengali translations of the Regulations which would be kept at all 'populous parts' of the town.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *Exposition*, 24.

<sup>175</sup> *Exposition*, 24.

<sup>176</sup> *Exposition*, 23.

<sup>177</sup> *Exposition*, 16.

Rammohun also traced the improvements which would occur in the judicial process with the implementation of his suggestions. For example, in the restructured *Panchayat* system, where appeals could be made only in those cases where judge and jury differed in opinion, the chief benefit would be less delays in the courts.<sup>178</sup>

In this context, Rammohun identified a problem. Even with Bengali translations, the Company's current system of laws (regulations) were too dense and complicated for a jury. This applied to civil as well as criminal laws. Further, Company laws being organised according to religion led to confusion for the jurors unacquainted with such details.<sup>179</sup> Rammohun argued that the Company should employ 'persons thoroughly acquainted with *Hindu* and *Muhammadan* law' as well as 'principles of British law' to form a new code of civil and criminal laws respectively.<sup>180</sup> This process of codification was conceptualised as a long term process which would take 'many years'. The code of civil and criminal laws would be 'clear, precise' and 'written in current language', a 'standard of justice' by itself which did not require any additional explanation from any particular religious book.<sup>181</sup> Rammohun did not however specify the details of what the code would contain. Instead, his focus was the process in which it could be formulated.

According to Rammohun, the current process of law making adopted by the Company was faulty. He argued that laws originated as 'regulations' drawn up by Company men in the districts and approved by the Governor-General.<sup>182</sup> Thus the process of law

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<sup>178</sup> *Exposition*, 23.

<sup>179</sup> *Exposition*, 49.

<sup>180</sup> *Exposition*, 43.

<sup>181</sup> *Exposition*, 43.

<sup>182</sup> *Exposition*, 49.

making was characterised by ‘want of local knowledge’ at the stage of framing the regulation itself. Consequently, most laws were found ‘not to answer in practice’.<sup>183</sup> Rammohun suggested a new system in which laws would be enacted in the same way as an ‘Act of Parliament’ in Britain where laws were discussed by ‘the King, Lords and Commons’ before being enacted.<sup>184</sup> This did not mean that Rammohun was proposing an identical system in India. Rather, by introducing his suggestions in terms that his audience/readers would be familiar with, Rammohun was setting the context for *his argument* for making the Company’s administration accountable to a Bengali public.

Rammohun argued that Company regulations ‘should be debated and discussed amongst persons who will be affected by them’. These included head native officers of the Board of Revenue, *Muftis* of the *Sudder Dewani Adalat* as well as ‘highly respectable’ merchants and ‘principal *Zamindars*’ of Bengal for their opinions and recommendations. A copy of these communications would be sent by the Company at Bengal to the Court of Directors and a ‘standing committee of the House of Commons’ for ‘conformation and amendment’. Only after this process would the Regulation become law.<sup>185</sup>

We note that Rammohun’s suggestions identified potential local centres of power in Bengal such as *Zamindars*, merchants, head native officers in revenue and judicial service as well as the importance of parliamentary intervention in London in framing Company law.<sup>186</sup> Rammohun’s suggestions for the *Panchayat* as an independent jury in which the public played an important role demonstrated his political thought of

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<sup>183</sup> *Exposition*, 49.

<sup>184</sup> *Exposition*, 49.

<sup>185</sup> *Exposition*, 50.

<sup>186</sup> *Exposition*, 51.

creating local forms of accountable governance. In time, however he hoped that his suggestions would lead to a new form of government in Bengal which did not require the Company to 'stand isolated in the midst of its subjects supporting itself merely by the exertion of superior force'.<sup>187</sup> The importance of participation and role of natives and native officials in Bengal was thus explained to readers in the distant but important city of London.

## Conclusion

In 1831, Rammohun Roy's radical suggestions on Company governance was published in the Appendix of the Select Committee's report. Rammohun also published his suggestions as a privately printed book, the *Exposition*, and explained his ideas using familiar references (such as Blackstone's *Commentaries*).

The *Exposition* argued that the Company could be made accountable to the natives of India by creating new local centres of power manned by native officials. In this way, Rammohun articulated a political project of governmental accountability through the *Exposition*. The text thus emphasises that distance and accountability were important contexts to Rammohun's political thought.

Rammohun regarded the Cornwallis' code's attempt to separate revenue from judicial administration as its key feature. The Cornwallis code however had led to frequent cases of native corruption. Rammohun's solution to the problem was better paid posts with higher responsibilities in government.

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<sup>187</sup> *Exposition*, 51.

The main difference between the Cornwallis code and Rammohun's suggestions was the element of historical continuity. Rammohun argued that the division between revenue and judicial administration was not only an influence of the Cornwallis code but also the framework of older systems of government. In this context, Rammohun argued that the native official should be given a greater role because this indeed was the case with the current and previous forms of governance in Bengal. The Cornwallis code on the other hand envisaged a system in which Indians would have no role in higher administration. Cornwallis's argument was that native officials were unsuited for higher posts.

Rammohun's suggestions on Company governance articulated a basic point: that natives have a role in their own governance in Bengal. His suggestions called for a policy in which the Company could govern Bengal effectively with help from the Bengali public and native officials. 'I have kept in view the interests of the governors and the governed', he wrote, 'without losing sight of a just regard to economy. I have been actuated by a desire to see the administration of justice in India placed on a solid and permanent foundation'.<sup>188</sup>

This does not mean that Rammohun argued against *any* intervention from London. He argued that Company intervention from London was an important preventive against the Company ('local government') from implementing defective decisions on governance and noted that the Company in London should be aware of 'any regulations or orders in judicial or revenue matters' framed by the 'local government' in Bengal. Rammohun's critique of the 1830 measures is a case in point. By arguing

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<sup>188</sup> *Exposition*, 153.

that the measures constituted bad governance, Rammohun strongly implied that the Company at London repeal them.

Rammohun's suggestions were economical. The appendix to the *Exposition* also cited records of financial accounts of the Company and showed that the new system of restructured administration would not involve any additional expenditure but rather save greater amounts of money.<sup>189</sup> This was therefore a realistic project.

An important part of the *Exposition* was about restructuring the role of the native official in the Company. Native officials were seen as potential jurors, members of the *Panchayat* and members of the 'public' who would debate and critique Company policy in Bengal. Rammohun argued that native officials should be in 'places of authority and trust in government', as he reminded his readers, administrators were in Britain.<sup>190</sup> His political project of accountability and creation of new centres of power gave an important role to native officials.

Rammohun's argument about the centrality of the native official in the Company's administration was also influenced by his own association with the Company.

Rammohun had worked with Company officials in Bengal revenue administration as a formal employee (*Dewan*) and private language teacher (*Munshi*) from 1802-14. For the most part, Rammohun's association with the Company was based on personal acquaintance with Collectors rather than bureaucratic eligibility requirements. This was not unusual. The next chapter shows that the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century was a period of fluid networks of communication between native

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<sup>189</sup> *Exposition*, 55.

<sup>190</sup> *Exposition*, 54.

employees and Collectors, of an excessive dependence on native employees for everyday administrative tasks and an unwillingness by Company officials at Calcutta to engage or regulate native officials in the districts. As the next chapter shows, Rammohun's ideas of the native officials in the *Exposition* was based on a historical context.

## **Chapter two: The native employees of the East India Company, c.1765-1814.**

The previous chapter's discussion of the *Exposition* concluded that the role of native employees in Company administration was central to Rammohun's ideas of governance.<sup>191</sup> Rammohun argued that native employees were not given good salaries or high posts in Company administration.<sup>192</sup>

This chapter argues that Rammohun's stress on the centrality of the native employee in the Company can be traced to his association with the Company (as an informal *Dewan*) and the historical context of the *Dewan's* post in the late-eighteenth century and will conclude that the administrative and political implications of Rammohun's ideas was a strong case for a new form of governance in Bengal in which the native employee would have a key role.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one shows that Rammohun's association with the Company from 1802-14 was crucial to the formation of his core ideas on the importance and role of the native employee in the Company and section two places his arguments concerning native employees within the framework of a Company administration based in Bengal and London.

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<sup>191</sup> *Exposition*, 34.

<sup>192</sup> *Exposition*, 34.



## **Section One: Rammohun's association with the Company and the historical context of native employees in Bengal, c.1765-1814**

Rammohun's association with the Company (1802-14) was an important contemporary and historical context to his ideas of governance.<sup>193</sup> This can be seen in his argument in the *Exposition* that the Company had inherited a form of government which had emerged from Early-Modern courtly culture. To Rammohun, the Company had *inherited* an administrative service rather than created an official cadre of its own. This meant that the administration was dependent on a native official class which preceded it.

In this section we see that the implication of this stress on courtly culture and government was that the Company should also should employ more natives who were trained in such forms of governance. Rammohun's argument in the *Exposition* emerges more clearly by reading his autobiographical sketch alongside. This is because his autobiographical sketch referred to his family's courtly background:

My ancestors were Brahmins of a high order [who] about a hundred and forty years ago gave up spiritual exercises for worldly pursuit [...] and according to the usual fate of couriers with various success sometimes rising to honour and sometimes falling; sometimes rich and sometimes poor; sometimes excelling in success and sometimes miserable in disappointment.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Sophia Dobson Collet, *Life and Letters of Rajah Rammohun Roy*, ed. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, (Calcutta, 1962), 58.

<sup>194</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 496.

Rammohun's references to the changing fortunes of his family show the uncertainty, dynamism and rapid changes involved in a career in the early-modern courts and highlights the historicity of his claim.<sup>195</sup>

Rammohun was not simply making a rhetorical point in references to courtly association. The earliest evidence of Rammohun's family's association with courtly administration is his great-great grandfather, Parasuram Bannerjee's employment in the Bengal Sultanate court as *Roy Rayan* [chief revenue accountant]. Parasuram was given the title 'Roy' in recognition of his scribal work.<sup>196</sup> In this context we note that Kumkum Chatterjee argued that the title 'Roy' was given to courtiers in recognition of not only their work but a prior association of their family in high bureaucracy.<sup>197</sup> Chatterjee's argument shows that Rammohun's family had already been involved with the court even before Parasuram's appointment as the *Roy Rayan*.

Parasuram's son, Krishnachandra, adopted 'Roy' as the family's surname and succeeded him as *Roy Rayan*. His son (Rammohun's grandfather) Brojobinod Roy was associated with the courts of the Bengal *Nawabs*, Siraj-ud- Daulah and Muhabat Jung as well as the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II (r.1760-1806).<sup>198</sup> Thus Rammohun's family was associated with Sultanate, *Nawabi* and late-Mughal courts as members of the high bureaucracy.

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<sup>195</sup> The references to dynamism in courtly culture can also be read as an argument against the static polity which was attributed to Bengali history by Rammohun's contemporary, James Mill (who was also associated with the East India Company as Head Examiner of the Department of Correspondence in the India Office). For Mill's Company record see William Foster, 'James Mill in Leadenhall Street, 1819-1836', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 10 (1913), 162-173.

<sup>196</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, ed. Hem Chandra Sarkar (Calcutta, 1914), 2.

<sup>197</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, 'Scribal Elites in Sultanate and Mughal Bengal', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 47 (2010), 453.

<sup>198</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 12.

Drawing from the insights of Chatterjee's study of Persianisation and Mughal culture in early-modern Bengal, Rammohun's family's lengthy association with *Nawabi* bureaucracy can be seen as a representative example of an inter-generational upper caste scribal Hindu elite centred on Perso-Arabic intellectual culture.<sup>199</sup> Rammohun's autobiographical references can be seen as evidence of this hypothesis:

In conformity with the usage of my paternal race and the wish of my father, I studied the Arabic and Persian languages- these being indispensable to those who attached themselves to the courts of Mohameddan princes.<sup>200</sup>

Rammohun's education thus further clarifies his status as an upper-caste Hindu scribe educated in Persian and a part of a scribal community which had been employed by *Nawabi*, Late-Mughal and Sultanate courts. According to Chatterjee, the scribal elite were employed in early-modern courts from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Scribal employment during this period developed into an elite source of employment. As Chatterjee showed, the scribal employees gradually became a caste by themselves.<sup>201</sup>

In the late-eighteenth century, elite Hindu scribal communities were also employed by the East India Company. This is because scribal knowledge of Persian (the language of administration, revenue, judiciary and commercial transactions in Bengal) made them indispensable to the Company's administration.<sup>202</sup> In this context, scribes were also employed privately by Company officials as language teachers (*Munshis*) of Persian.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Chatterjee, *Scribal Elites*, 470.

<sup>200</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 496.

<sup>201</sup> Chatterjee, *Scribal Elites*, 450-7.

<sup>202</sup> Chatterjee, *Scribal Elites*, 457.

<sup>203</sup> Chatterjee, *Scribal Elites*, 462.

As Rammohun pointed out in the *Exposition*, most Company men had severe difficulties deciphering Persian revenue and judicial documents.<sup>204</sup>

The dependence on an older scribal elite led to a fluid and informal network of association between Company men and their scribes in matters of employment under the Company. As Frederick Lehmann, P.J. Marshall and Subhas Mukhopadhyay's research on late-eighteenth century native employment showed, the eligibility of Kalyan Singh, Shitab Singh, Rai Durlabh, Raj Ballabh, Ganga Govind Singh and Prankrishen Singh to high posts such as *Naib Dewan* of Bengal, *Naib Dewan* of Bihar, *Dewan* of Calcutta and *Roy Rayan* were due to their personal association with Company men and the scribal backgrounds of their families rather than any specific bureaucratic eligibility criterion.<sup>205</sup> That scribes were also employed in large numbers in Bengal district administration can be seen in P.J. Marshall's study of native officials which highlighted a 'virtual Hindu monopoly' of Bengali scribes.<sup>206</sup>

The Company was however wary of the dependency of its officials on scribes. Responding to the need for Company officials to be well versed in the official language of the administration, the Governor-General Richard Wellesley founded the Fort William College in 1800 to teach Persian, Arabic, Hindustani and Bengali to the newly arrived Company officials in India.<sup>207</sup> The College's effectiveness was however limited since graduates continued to depend on private language teachers (*Munshis*). For

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<sup>204</sup> *Exposition*, 7.

<sup>205</sup> Fredrick Lehmann, 'The Eighteenth Century Transition in India: Responses of some Bihar Intellectuals' (Wisconsin Univ. PhD. Thesis, 1967), 124; P.J. Marshall, 'Indian Officials under the East India Company in Eighteenth Century Bengal', *Bengal: Past and Present*, 84 (1967), 105; Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *The Career of Rajah Rai Durlabham Mahindra, Rai Durlabh, Diwan of Bengal, 1710-70* (Calcutta, 1974), 5 and 188.

<sup>206</sup> Marshall, 'Indian Officials', 103.

<sup>207</sup> Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahebs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William* (Calcutta, 1978), 1-23.

example, early graduates such as Charles Metcalfe and James Princep both learnt Persian under private *Munshis*.<sup>208</sup> Metcalfe in particular was critical of the College's curriculum as an aid to district administration. On the other hand, he had 'a soft corner' for his *Munshi*.<sup>209</sup>

As we shall see further in this chapter, Rammohun was employed by another early graduate of Fort William College, John Digby. Digby had enrolled in the College in 1800 and met Rammohun in 1801 while studying Persian, Bengali and Hindustani at the College.<sup>210</sup> Unlike Metcalfe, Digby had no talent for Indian languages. A brief survey of his student records at Fort William College underscores this point. His first exam in 1801 in Hindustani placed him in the 'lowest class'.<sup>211</sup> (An indication of the very poor standards of the 'lowest class' was its peculiar ranking system. Candidates were ranked according to the alphabetical order of their names in the lowest class and according to their performance in the examinations in the first, second and third class). The next year marked an improvement. Digby was ranked according to his performance, but eleventh of twelve candidates in Bengali.<sup>212</sup> Persian proved to be his greatest challenge. In 1803 Digby sat for the Persian examinations in January and July. He was ranked forty ninth in a class of fifty three in January and at the bottom of his class in July.<sup>213</sup> Although his performance in Persian improved by the time of his last year of

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<sup>208</sup> Robert Haldane Rattray, *The Exile: a poem* (Calcutta, 1837), 251.

<sup>209</sup> Das, *Sahebs and Munshis*, 110.

<sup>210</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 15.

<sup>211</sup> *Primitae Orientales: Containing the Theses in the Oriental Languages pronounced at the Public Disputations on the 29th March, 1803 by the Students of the College of Fort William in Bengal with Translations* (Calcutta, 1803), xxvii.

<sup>212</sup> *Primitae Orientales*, xxx.

<sup>213</sup> *Primitae Orientales*, xxvii.

examinations (securing the thirty second rank), it can be surmised that he would still require the help of an experienced private *Munshi*.<sup>214</sup>

Rammohun had gained some experience as a private *Munshi* before being appointed by Digby in 1805. In 1802, Thomas Woodforde (the Register of the Appellate court of Murshidabad) employed him as a private *Munshi*. In February 1803 Woodforde was appointed as the acting-collector of Decca-Jelalpur and appointed Rammohun the *Dewan* of that district a month later in March.<sup>215</sup> The instance of a private *Munshi* being absorbed into Company service indicates the lack of bureaucratic eligibility requirements for the highest native post in the districts. However, Rammohun resigned after being *Dewan* for only 62 days as Woodforde left the Company's civil service in May.<sup>216</sup> Rammohun's swift resignation after Woodforde left the Company service shows that native employees in high posts in the districts during this period were attached to the person of the Company official and their careers were affected likewise. Rammohun then joined the Writer's establishment at Benares as 'native assistant' from May till July 1803.<sup>217</sup>

Digby graduated from Fort William College in 1804 and was first posted as Assistant to the Register of Dhaka and then as register of the *Nizami Adalat*.<sup>218</sup> Digby employed Rammohun as private *Munshi* on being transferred to Ramgarh as Register in 1805 and also appointed him as the acting- *Sheristedar* of the *Faujdari* court for three months.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> *Primitae Orientales*, 17.

<sup>215</sup> *Rajah Rammohun Roy: Letters and Documents*, ed. Rama Prasad Chanda and Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (Calcutta, i, 1988), 27.

<sup>216</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Letters and Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 27.

<sup>217</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 412. While the job description of native assistant is not specified, Rammohun is listed as native employee.

<sup>218</sup> *General Register of the Hon. East India Company's Servants in the Bengal Establishment, 1790-1842*, ed. Ram Chunder Doss (Calcutta, 1844), 140-1.

<sup>219</sup> *The Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Dilip Kumar Biswas (Delhi, i, 1992), 24.

This appointment proved to be a turning point in Rammohun's association with the Digby since it gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his skills in revenue accounting and Company regulations.<sup>220</sup> Henceforth, Rammohun helped Digby in revenue administration whilst employed as his private *Munshi*. By the end of 1808 Digby was convinced that Rammohun was eligible for the *Dewan's* post.<sup>221</sup>

Digby's opportunity to appoint Rammohun to this post came only a few months later when he was transferred to Rangpur as Acting-Collector in 1809.<sup>222</sup> Rangpur was an important posting. Although a frontier district, it had been at the centre stage of Company politics in the late eighteenth century due to its unfavourable geopolitical climate. Bordered by the unfriendly *Zamindaris* of Cooch Behar and Dinajpur, Rangpur had been the site of peasant rebellions in 1783.<sup>223</sup> As Jon Wilson has shown, the Rangpur rebellions were considered to be a serious threat by Company officials and even debated in Parliament during the impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings as a case of over reach and misgovernance by the Company.<sup>224</sup> Its economic importance to the Company lay in its trade of tobacco and opium.<sup>225</sup> For this reason, Governor-Generals from Hastings to Cornwallis had been keen on improving trade relations with the neighbouring countries of Bhutan and Nepal.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

<sup>221</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

<sup>222</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Letters and Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 42.

<sup>223</sup> Jon Wilson, 'A Thousand Countries to go': Peasants and Rulers in Late-Eighteenth Century Bengal', *Past and Present*, 189 (2005), 81.

<sup>224</sup> Wilson, 'A Thousand Countries to go', 83.

<sup>225</sup> Wilson, 'A Thousand Countries to go', 83.

<sup>226</sup> John Bray, 'Krishnakant Basu, Rammohan Ray and Early Nineteenth Century contacts with Bhutan and Tibet', *Tibet Journal Special Issue*, 34 (2009), 1-6.

Digby was formally appointed Collector of Rangpur in October 1809 and appointed Rammohun as *Dewan* the next month.<sup>227</sup> In accordance with Company procedure, Digby informed the Board of Revenue at Calcutta of Rammohun's appointment as *Dewan*:

[...] Having in conformity with your orders [...] accepted the resignation of Ghulam Shah, late *Dewan* of this office I beg leave to acquaint you for the information of the Board that I have appointed Rammohun Roy in his room, a man of a very respectable family and excellent education; fully competent to discharge the duties of such an office, and from a long acquaintance with him I have reason to suppose that he will acquit himself in the capacity of the *Dewan* with industry, integrity and ability. I hope to be favoured with the Board's sanction of this appointment.<sup>228</sup>

We note that Ghulam Shah resigned from the post of *Dewan* soon after the previous Collector had been transferred. The brief mention of Ghulam Shah's resignation showed that the continuing occurrence of *Dewans* being attached to the Company official than the bureaucracy in Calcutta. Thus it was not unusual that Rammohun's appointment as *Dewan* was as much a result of his education as his informal association with Digby. The Board however cited the lack of bureaucratic eligibility criterion in their response to Digby:

Ordered that the Collector of Rangpur be directed to inform the Board in what public office the person alluded to in his letter has been employed [...].<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 42.

<sup>228</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 42.

<sup>229</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 42.



Digby wrote back to the Board about Rammohun's prior appointment in Ramgarh for three months but stressed the importance of personal association as the main criterion for employment as *Dewan*:

From what I saw of his [Rammohun's] knowledge of the [Company] Regulations [and] accounts during that time [at Ramgarh] and during the term of my acting at the Collector of Jessore [1807] as well as the opinion I have formed of his probity and general qualifications in five years [1805-9] acquaintance with him, I am convinced that he is well adapted for this situation of *Dewan* of a Collector's office.<sup>230</sup>

This suggested that Digby stressed personal association with Rammohun as *the* eligibility criterion. The Board however ignored Digby's argument:

The Board [are] of the opinion that it is essentially necessary that all persons who may be appointed to the responsible post of the *Dewan* should have been some time in the habits of transacting Revenue details and also he will be acquainted with the Regulations. [...] The Board further observe that the service performed by Rammohun Roy as Acting *Sheristedar* of a *Faujdari* Court cannot be considered **by the Board** as rendering him in any degree competent to perform the more important duties of a *Dewan* which are in their nature totally different.<sup>231</sup>  
(Emphasis mine)

The Board ordered that another *Dewan* be appointed. Digby however continued to employ Rammohun as *Dewan* and appealed the Board's decision. He did so in the following way. First, he correctly assessed the Board's argument:

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<sup>230</sup> Rammohun Roy: *Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

<sup>231</sup> Rammohun Roy: *Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

[...] the Board assert [that] his inexperience in the transaction of the business attached to the office of the *Dewan* [is the] reason for refusing to confirm Rammohun Roy in the appointment of a *Dewan*.<sup>232</sup>

Second, Digby contrasted this assessment of Rammohun with the informal association between a Company official and his private *munshi* regardless of the Board's requirements:

I imagined that such objection [by the Board] would have been sufficiently obviated by what I mentioned in my [previous] letter as to the knowledge he [Rammohun] evinced of the [Company] Regulations and of the general system to be adopted for the collection of revenue when with me in the capacity of a private *Munshi* [...]. Being thoroughly acquainted with the merits and abilities of Rammohun Roy it would be repugnant to my feelings [...] to remove him from his present employment in which I have continued to employ him in the hope that the [...] knowledge of his business which I have declared him to possess will induce them to confirm him in the appointment of *Dewan* of my office for which I am confident he is well qualified. Moreover, I cannot refrain from observing that in many instances *Dewans* of Collectors have been confirmed by the Board who had never been employed in any public office.<sup>233</sup>

By drawing attention to his general argument that privately employed *Munshis* were also qualified to be *Dewans*, Digby implied that the Board's insistence on 'employment in public office' amounted to an assertion of bureaucratic eligibility criterion for *Dewans* which did not exist. The implication was not missed by the Board and led to an angry response. The Board 'greatly disapproved' of Digby's 'style' and warned of

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<sup>232</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

<sup>233</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 43.

‘serious notice of any repetition of disrespect towards them’<sup>234</sup>. Further, the Board ‘did not see any ground’ to confirm Rammohun’s appointment but rather repeated their order to appoint another *Dewan*.<sup>235</sup> For the Board, the matter regarding Rammohun’s employment or association in the revenue administration had already been resolved and they did not re-consider their original decision.

Unknown to the Board however, Rammohun continued to work in the revenue administration till 1814. The Board was made aware of this after Digby wrote to them in August 1814 (a month *after* he had formally given over charge of Rangpur.)<sup>236</sup> Digby did not however inform the Board of Rammohun’s role in Rangpur as a separate case but rather in context of petition which had been approved and forwarded by the Board in April that year for the appointment of Nawal Kishore Sen as *Dewan* of Rangpur.<sup>237</sup> Although Digby had rejected Sen’s petition in April, he felt that the matter was still unresolved:

It may not be irrelevant to inform you that Nawal Kishore Sen has suffered the punishment of seven years imprisonment in the Jails of Rangpur and 24 Parganas in conformity to a sentence passed upon him by the Court of Circuit at Murshidabad.<sup>238</sup>

Since Sen had been recommended for the post by the Board, his unsuitability to work in a revenue office also reflected badly on the Board’s choice of *Dewans*. Sen’s record was then contrasted with Rammohun’s association with the Revenue department of Rangpur (and eminent suitability to the post of *Dewan*):

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<sup>234</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 44.

<sup>235</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 44.

<sup>236</sup> Nirmalya Bagchi, *Rammohan Charcha* (Calcutta, 1995), Ch. 1.

<sup>237</sup> Bagchi, *Rammohan Charcha*, Ch. 1.

<sup>238</sup> Bagchi, *Rammohan Charcha*, Ch. 1.

Upon the resignation of the office of the *Dewan* delivered by Ghulam Shah, I [Digby] nominated Rammohun Roy in the month of December 1809 to that station. [After] the Board [...] desired me to select a more experienced man for that office [...] I allowed Rammohun to officiate [...] and in the month of March 1811 appointed Himatullah Chaudhari [as] Dewan. [Henceforth] Rammohun Roy [was] not employed in any department in my office but I do not hesitate to confess that I have consulted him on several occasions relative to every important matter on revenue business.<sup>239</sup>

To the Board, Digby's letter was a statement of Rammohun's career in the Rangpur Collectorate office from 1809-14. It clearly showed that Digby had ignored every objection that the Board had made to Rammohun's appointment and continued to employ him. The Board wrote a furious letter in response:

The Board consider your conduct very reprehensible and a manifest evasion of rules prescribed in the existing Regulations and of the Board's rejection of Rammohun Roy's nomination as *Dewan* [...] You will be held responsible for any abuses which may appear to have been practiced by the person in question through your unwarrantable employment of him in official duties and through the attendant influence on such undue demonstration of favour.<sup>240</sup>

The Board's objection is clearly to the idea that Rammohun may have worked as an informal *Dewan* alongside the official *Dewan* Himatullah Chaudhari. The question that arises here is to what extent did Rammohun effectively work as a *Dewan* at Rangpur? Digby clarified Rammohun's role in Rangpur publicly in 1817 in his introduction to the London reprint of Rammohun's *Translation of the Abridgement of the Vedānta*. (The

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<sup>239</sup> Bagchi, *Rammohan Charcha*, Ch. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Bagchi, *Rammohan Charcha*, Ch. 1.

specific inclusion of Rammohun's Company record in a text on religion indicates that its intended readership included Company officials.) Digby noted that:

[Rammohun] was employed as *Dewan* or principal native officer in the collection of revenues in the district of which I was for five years Collector [and also] perused all my public correspondence.<sup>241</sup>

The only district in which Digby had been appointed Collector had spent as long a period as five years continuously was Rangpur from 1809-14.<sup>242</sup> We note that since Digby had decided on Rammohun's eligibility based on his work in the revenue department as private *Munshi* before his appointment as *Dewan* (1805-9), the total duration of Rammohun's association with revenue administration under Digby was for ten years. Digby's statement shows that Rammohun's vantage point of Company administration was the post of the *Dewan* and that his lengthy association with the Company culminated in the *Dewan*-ship of Rangpur.

Rammohun's *Dewan*-ship however begs the question that if Digby had appointed Rammohun on the strength of his personal association, then what was the importance of the Board of Revenue's citation of bureaucratic criterion to block Rammohun's appointment?

In his revised edition of Sophia Collet's biography, Dilip Biswas argued that the appointment was dismissed in response to his successful petition to the Governor-General Lord Minto against the Collector of Bhagalpur, Sir Frederick Hamilton in 1809.<sup>243</sup> Biswas opined that Hamilton belonged to a powerful clique in the Board of

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<sup>241</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 22.

<sup>242</sup> *General Register of East India Company Servants in Bengal*, ed. Doss, 140-1.

<sup>243</sup> Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 15.

Revenue that took revenge against Rammohun by dismissing his appointment. While Biswas refers to the writings of Rammohun's friend, Col. James Young for this information we note that Young was echoing a general opinion in Calcutta in 1828 rather than writing from specific experience of the case.<sup>244</sup>

There is however a context for the argument that Hamilton may have had powerful allies in the Government at Calcutta. As the fifth baron of Silverton Hill at Lanark, Scotland, Hamilton was a member of a hereditary aristocracy. His family was also connected to the military since his great-grandfather and father had held high ranks in the British Army as Major and Lieutenant General respectively.<sup>245</sup> Hamilton had arrived in India in 1796 and worked in Calcutta (Translator's Office in Persian) and Hooghly. At the time of Rammohun's petition in 1809, he would have been in India for thirteen years.<sup>246</sup>

To explain why this chapter does not agree with the interpretation of Biswas and how this has a bearing on the broader argument of the centrality of the native employee and critique of the Company's administration in Rammohun's political thought we revisit the circumstances surrounding the case.

In April 1809, Rammohun petitioned the Governor-General, Lord Minto against the conduct of Frederick Hamilton, the collector of Bhagalpur.<sup>247</sup> (Rammohun was private *Munshi* to Digby at the time.) Upon enquiry by the Governor-General's office,

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<sup>244</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 18.

<sup>245</sup> *Complete Baronetage*, ed. George Cockayne (Exeter, ii, 1902), 454. Hamilton's son would later join the East India Company as Magistrate of Meerut in 1834, rise to Lieutenant Governor of the North western provinces in 1841 and eventually be commended by Parliament for services to the Company in the 1857 revolt.

<sup>246</sup> *General Register of East India Company Servants in Bengal*, ed. Doss, 158.

<sup>247</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 11. Biswas shows that the exact date on which the petition was sent is not traceable.

Hamilton produced his own account of the circumstances described in Rammohun's petition.<sup>248</sup> Both Rammohun and Hamilton agreed that the complaint concerned a specific incident which had occurred in January at Bhagalpur when Rammohun's *palki* had passed by Hamilton (who had been supervising the construction of a brick kiln nearby) without acknowledgement but their accounts of what happened next differed.

According to Rammohun he had not seen Hamilton as his *palki* passed and would not have recognised him as the Collector of the district even if he had. He however heard 'gross abuse' from him:

As [the *palki* of] your petitioner [Rammohun] was passing, Sir Frederick Hamilton repeatedly called out to him to get out of his palanquin with an epithet of abuse too gross to admit of being stated here [...]<sup>249</sup>

On hearing the 'abuse' the *palki* stopped and Rammohun's *palki* bearer explained to Hamilton that the mistake had been unintentional.<sup>250</sup> The *palki* then continued for 'about 300 yards' before Hamilton overtook it 'on horseback' and demanded that the *palki* bearer be dismissed from employment and that Rammohun salute him in 'Mughal style' (prostration).<sup>251</sup>

Your petitioner then far from wishing to withhold any manifestation of the respect due to the public officers of a Government which he held in the highest veneration and notwithstanding the novelty of the form [prostration] in which that respect was to be testified, alighted from his palanquin and saluted Sir Frederick Hamilton and apologised [...]<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 9.

<sup>249</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 2.

<sup>250</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 2.

<sup>251</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 3.

<sup>252</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 3.

To Rammohun, the 'Mughal style' salute by the Company official was the central aspect of the 'gross abuse' subjected to him since it affected his self-esteem 'in the eyes of the natives' (in this case, his *palki* bearers). Hamilton left after Rammohun saluted him.<sup>253</sup>

Hamilton's account did not contain any reference of the salute. It also related a different version of events. According to Hamilton, Rammohun had at first deliberately ridden past ('I took no notice of him nor he of me') but then sent his *palki* bearer to salute him.<sup>254</sup> Hamilton interpreted this as a slight and confronted Rammohun with a 'reproach' and a warning of the future *possibility* of 'abuse' from other Company officials:

I reproached him for his want of civility and warned him how he did so again to other gentlemen lest he might find one who would not keep his temper with him as well as I had done.<sup>255</sup>

On being informed that neither Rammohun nor the *palki* bearer had recognised him as Collector, Hamilton recommended that Rammohun dismiss the *palki* bearer to prevent the possibility of a future confrontation with a Company official and was polite to him even when confronted with unprovoked anger ('should I cut off the servant's [palki bearer's] ears?')<sup>256</sup>

Hamilton's account thus presents a reversal of roles from Rammohun's account in which Hamilton (and not Rammohun) had been the recipient of Rammohun's (and not

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<sup>253</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 3.

<sup>254</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 9.

<sup>255</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 9.

<sup>256</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 9.



Hamilton's) unprovoked anger and that Hamilton (and not Rammohun) had tried diffuse the situation. The reversal of roles also show that both accounts were written with two different *intentions*. In this context, the inclusion of specific (but not overlapping) additional information in both accounts helps us to decipher the likely authorial intention of each account.

We note that while Hamilton alleged that Rammohun had filed a suit on the incident in the Supreme Court in Calcutta and the case had been dismissed, this information was not present in Rammohun's account.<sup>257</sup> Hamilton's reference to the alleged Supreme Court case can be read as an attempt to nullify the impact or implications of the case altogether while Rammohun's account of the humiliating 'Mughal style salute' placed a seemingly isolated event on a much larger canvas of the Company's attitude towards the natives by referring to it as a failure of the 'liberal and enlightened policy' of the Government.

[When] your petitioner [Rammohun] for the first time understood [...] that he [Hamilton] required an external form of respect [the Mughal style salute], which, to whatever extent might have been enforced under the Mughal government, your petitioner had conceived from daily observation to have fallen under the milder, more enlightened and liberal policy of the British government into entire disuse and disesteem.<sup>258</sup>

Rammohun's suspicion of whether the 'Mughal style salute' was ever practiced by the Mughals themselves shows a familiarity with courtly practice and implies that Hamilton's insistence of the 'Mughal style' salute was illegitimate.

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<sup>257</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 10.

<sup>258</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 3.

Rammohun's petition also indicated that he was not only familiar with everyday Company administrative practices in the districts but also with certain terms in contemporary British political discourse. Rammohun used terms such as 'liberal policy' and 'enlightened government' which the Governor-General Lord Minto was likely to have been familiar with to better explain *his* perspective that the Government in Calcutta was accountable to the natives for the mistreatment of its officials. The use of these terms is therefore strategic. This is the earliest example that we find of this strategy. The rest of the thesis in a sense shows the development of this core idea into a sophisticated programme of reform and political thought in later writings.

An unintentional impetus to the success of Rammohun's strategy was that Hamilton's strategy of referring the Governor-General to an allegedly unsuccessful Supreme Court case backfired. The Governor-General's office not only enquired into the suit but also directed the Secretary of Government to inform the Magistrate of Bhagalpur of the results of their inquiries:

[From] enquiries it does not appear that Rammohun Roy ever instituted any suit [...] or at all events that such a suit was brought to trial. His Lordship in Council deems it however sufficient to desire that, you will caution Sir Frederick Hamilton against any similar altercation with any natives in future.<sup>259</sup>

While Hamilton's lie about Rammohun's alleged suit certainly cast doubt on his version of events, the Government's subsequent 'caution' to Hamilton was however a leap in judgement since the discovery of Hamilton's lie did not contradict his story about the incident concerning Rammohun's *palki*. The caution appears even more perfunctory

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<sup>259</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 10-1.

since the decision was taken even before the court at Bhagalpur began its independent enquiry. The Government was therefore quite certain that Hamilton had been at fault.

If Hamilton had indeed been a part of a powerful faction as current scholarship as Biswas argued, the Governor-General's office ought to have favoured Hamilton's case.

The question that arises is why was Rammohun's account believed over Hamilton's?

An important clue to this problem may be found in the information contained in both accounts about Rammohun's background and association with the Company.

Rammohun's account stressed that he was a part of an *older* tradition of courtly employment in administration:

Your petitioner's grandfather was at various times, chief of different districts during the administration of His Highness the *Nawab* Mohabut Jung [...] The education which your petitioner has received as well as the particulars of his birth and parentage will be made known to your Lordship by [...] the principal officers of the College of Fort William [...]<sup>260</sup>

Rammohun's reference to the *Nawab* by high titles and his own education and genealogy highlighted a record of Hindu scribal courtly employment under a ruler who represented a pre-Company period of administration. Hamilton's account had also provided some information on Rammohun by inaccurately identifying him as Digby's *Dewan*.<sup>261</sup> This gave the impression that Rammohun was not only a member of the old Hindu elite scribal community in Bengal but also a native employee.

Additionally, there may have been an important precedent to Calcutta's swift decision in favour of Rammohun. At least one other native employee petition against Hamilton

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<sup>260</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 5.

<sup>261</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 9.

had been received by the Government in Calcutta by the time of Rammohun's petition.

In May 1805, the native employees of the Bhagalpur collectorate had successfully petitioned the Governor-General's Council against their dismissal from the revenue administration by Hamilton.<sup>262</sup>

We note however that the crucial difference between Rammohun and the native petitioners of 1805 was that while the latter petitioned as legitimate employees of the Company who had been unfairly dismissed, the former was mistakenly attributed to be an employee at the time of complaint. While the Governor-General's office was not aware of the distinction, it is quite likely that Rammohun's potential future employers, the Board of Revenue was. A brief history of the responses of the Board of Revenue and the Governor-General's Council to subsequent complaints against Hamilton will further clarify this argument.

After Rammohun's petition, two further complaints were made against Hamilton in 1824 and 1827. The cases were concerned with Hamilton's role in district revenue administration. Both cases were initially reported to the Board of Revenue at Calcutta. The Board forwarded them to the Governor-General's Council which then forwarded them to London. Both times the Court of Directors assessed the situation as evidence of Hamilton's 'unfitness' to be a high official.<sup>263</sup> Matters came to a head however in 1830 when a complaint against Hamilton was made by native *malguzars* (who were not employees of government) alleging embezzlement from an unfair land auction. After an investigation, the Board recommended Hamilton's dismissal to

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<sup>262</sup> *Bengal Ms. Records*, ed. William Hunter (London, iv, 1894), 233.

<sup>263</sup> British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers [hereafter IOR] F/4/1239/40500, Board's Collections, John Loch Astell to Bengal Revenue Dept., 26<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1829.

Governor General's Council.<sup>264</sup> The case was again forwarded to London and the Court approved the dismissal as 'a fresh proof of his [Hamilton's] unfitness'.<sup>265</sup> Hamilton proceeded to England immediately afterwards and was never again employed by the Company. He died in England in 1853.

There are four points that emerge from these cases. First, at the core of each case was an administrative process in which the Governor-General's Council did *not* give the final assessment. The Governor-General's Council's only role in the process seems to have been to forward the cases to London. Second, in all three cases, the Board of Revenue conducted enquiries and recommended the next course of action to the Court. Third, the Board kept a record of complaints and referred to them as a cumulative process of assessments. Our information on the 1824 and 1827 cases for example comes from the Board's reference to them in 1830. Fourth, it was the Board (*and not the Governor-General's Council*) which recommended Hamilton's dismissal. This shows that the Board of Revenue rather than the Governor-General's Council was responsible for complaints against Hamilton and that the Board's decision making process was based on precedent and cumulative evidence.

From this perspective it is likely that the Board dismissed Rammohun's appointment in 1809 keeping in mind that they had been ignored in his petition earlier that year. Through continuing rejections of Rammohun's appointment, the Board asserted its

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<sup>264</sup> IOR, F/4/1239/40500, Board's Collections, Bengal Revenue Dept. to Court of Directors, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1830.

<sup>265</sup> IOR, F/4/1239/40500, Board's Collections, John Loch to Bengal Revenue Dept., 26<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1829.

position that his direct petition to Governor-General had effectively ended any chances of an official career as *Dewan* with Digby.

Our discussion also highlights the direct role of the Court of Directors in the proceedings of the Board of Revenue. Since the powers of the Board was criticised by Rammohun in the *Exposition* (as will be seen further on) it is worth noting the relationship between the Board of Revenue and the Court.

The Board of Revenue (consisting of four members and a President in the civil service) was based in Calcutta but formed by the order of the Court of Directors in 1785.<sup>266</sup> Further, the Court (rather than the Governor-General's Council) assigned the Board's the administrative responsibilities of collecting revenue and controlling all revenue appointments.<sup>267</sup> This explains the context of the Court's close involvement in matters of district revenue administration in Bengal.

Until 1793 the Board also had the right to administer their own courts. When Cornwallis annulled the revenue courts (arguing that they were contrary to the Permanent Settlements' basic organising principle of separating revenue administration from the judiciary), he compensated the Board's loss of power by granting greater establishment resources to exert an even greater control over revenue collection and appointments.<sup>268</sup>

A consequence of greater powers for the Board in revenue administration after 1793 was greater bureaucratic surveillance over the Collectors. Fluid networks of association

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<sup>266</sup> *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the East India Company, Bengal Presidency* (London, i, 1812) 25.

<sup>267</sup> *The Fifth Report*, 25.

<sup>268</sup> *The Fifth Report*, 25.

between the Company men and the native employees gradually became subject to new forms of control by the Board in the early nineteenth century. Thus while Woodforde appointed Rammohun as his *Dewan* in 1802 without comment from the Board, the situation had changed by 1814 as Digby was being strongly recommended to appoint the Board's choice of *Dewan*.

Digby's reference to Rammohun's role in Rangpur can be read as a strong criticism of the Board's Regulations. Digby's letter of dissent resulted in the Board instituting an enquiry into his finances but it did not otherwise affect his career. After his furlough in 1815-9, Digby was re-employed by the Company as Collector of Rajshahi in 1820 and later as Collector of Burdwan in 1821.<sup>269</sup> Both postings were important. The former was a provincial capital and latter was the highest paying revenue district in the Presidency.

After 1814, Rammohun was indirectly associated with the Company through his son, Radhaprasad. In 1822, Digby employed Radhaprasad as *Sheristedar* at the Burdwan collectorate.<sup>270</sup> The *Sheristedar's* post involved the checking of treasury papers in the Collectorate office.<sup>271</sup> Radhaprasad's role created controversy when Magistrate of Burdwan, J.R. Hutchinson alleged that he had been involved in stealing treasury deposits.<sup>272</sup> The Board of Revenue also sent a representative, Mr. Malony, to Burdwan to look into the case.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> *General Register of East India Company Servants in Bengal*, ed. Doss, 140-1.

<sup>270</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 419.

<sup>271</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 419.

<sup>272</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 343.

<sup>273</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 357.

Digby defended Radhaprasad against the Magistrate and the Board of Revenue's representative, by showing that he could not have 'interfered' with the treasury since he never handled cash deposits directly.<sup>274</sup> Malony was however not convinced and cited Rammohun's prior employment under Digby as evidence of the latter's flawed judgement.<sup>275</sup> The Board of Revenue subsequently condemned Digby and Radhaprasad.<sup>276</sup> Surprisingly for the Board however, the *Sudder Nizamat Adalat* (Supreme Court) later acquitted Radhaprasad of all charges.<sup>277</sup> To Rammohun, Radhaprasad's case showed that by affectively issuing condemnations even before the Supreme Court in Calcutta had declared its verdict, the Board of Revenue had emerged as an extraordinarily powerful government body.

As Chapter one showed, the *Exposition* was primarily concerned with the Company district administration in Bengal. The Board of Revenue had clearly emerged as the most important Company institution in the districts. In this context, Rammohun's criticism of the Board of Revenue was the focus of his discussion of revenue administration in the *Exposition*.<sup>278</sup> Rammohun argued that the Board's regulations prevented the Collector from being accountable to the natives. This is because the Regulations authorised the Collector with disproportionate administrative power over the native population such that 'legal redress' was 'impossible under the present system [of administration in Bengal]'.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 408.

<sup>275</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 455.

<sup>276</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 511.

<sup>277</sup> *Rammohun Roy: Documents*, ed. Chanda and Majumdar, 508-19.

<sup>278</sup> *Exposition*, 38.

<sup>279</sup> *Exposition*, 69.



The context that Rammohun etched was not only rhetorical but based on evidence. Rammohun stressed that the natives of Bengal were at the 'mercy' of the Collectors as cases against Collectors rarely reached the courts. Quoting an 1828 regulation that 'the decisions of the Collector [in the districts] shall have the force of a decree', Rammohun argued that such policies of preference to revenue administration over judicial redress for the natives had led to a long term climate of 'alarm and fear amongst the natives of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa'.<sup>280</sup>

In this context, Rammohun noted with approval that Bentinck as Governor-General had become the head of the Board of Revenue but did not however approve of his reforms in the internal revenue administration in 1830 in which the posts of the Collector and Judge were combined to form a new post known as Revenue Commissioner.<sup>281</sup> As the last chapter showed, Rammohun strongly recommended a complete roll back of the decision to appoint Revenue Commissioners.<sup>282</sup> Thus, Rammohun perceived the post of the Revenue Commissioner as an extension of the administrative scope of a Board which sanctioned an inordinate degree of power to the Collectors in the districts.

In this context, the Hamilton petition can be seen as a precedent to Rammohun's argument against Collectors in the *Exposition*. By presenting Hamilton as an example of a Company official who had abused his predominant position in the districts, the petition had highlighted a failure of governance but not suggested any solutions. In the *Exposition*, Rammohun suggested a solution by arguing that it was not the man-on-the

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<sup>280</sup> *Exposition*, 69.

<sup>281</sup> *Exposition*, 83.

<sup>282</sup> *Exposition*, 28.

spot but the native employee who ought to be the main official in the districts. This was done by unflatteringly presenting the Collector as an inefficient 'establishment cost' for the Government and contrasting it with the everyday role of the native employee:

The Collectors being covenanted European servants are employed [on] a salary of 1500 rupees per mensem [month]. The duties however are chiefly performed by native officers [...].<sup>283</sup>

The crucial role of the native employee in everyday governance made them the obvious solution to the problem of the expensive and over-reaching Company official. Rammohun suggested a radical solution in which all Collectors should be 'dispensed with' and native employees appointed in their place. A specific typology of native employees was also specified:

The desirable object [of] reducing the revenue establishment may be accomplished in the following manner: under the former government the natives of the country particularly the Hindus were exclusively employed in the revenue department in all stations and they are still so under the present system.<sup>284</sup>

From our discussion earlier, it is clear that the *Exposition* referred to an older scribal elite. This shows that the socio-linguistic group of native employees that lay at the core of Rammohun's ideas of the native employee were the Hindu scribal elite who had historically been a part of Bengal's administration. As we have seen in this section, Rammohun himself was a member of this community.

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<sup>283</sup> *Exposition*, 97.

<sup>284</sup> *Exposition*, 97.

There was also however a problem to this suggestion. Although the scribal elite still played an important role in district administration, Rammohun was aware that they were on the verge of being replaced by the new generation of native employees.

[...] particularly in the Presidency [of Bengal] bred up in communications and intercourse with the Europeans [and] progressively becoming imbued with their habits and in the course of time very nearly to them.<sup>285</sup>

To clarify why Rammohun was against this development, we take a step back to recall that his critique of the Collectors had highlighted their 'European' ethnicity to draw attention to his argument of the problems of employing an unfamiliar official employed by the Company at London to an important post. From this perspective, a native employee 'imbued in the habits' of a 'European' Collector would be a disaster since it would destroy the crucial importance of the 'local' native employees to everyday administration and render them with the same difficulties as the Collector. Rammohun's stress on London's employment of Collectors feeds into the implicit argument that the older generation of native employees were more accountable for their actions to the population of Bengal than a European Collector.

Rammohun's focus on the native employee however faced another problem. The old native employee posts which he was most likely referring to - *Kanungos*, *Naib Dewans*, and *Roy Rayans*- had been officially abolished by the Company in Calcutta by the second decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>286</sup> This was in accordance with the

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<sup>285</sup> *Exposition*, 110.

<sup>286</sup> IOR, P/54/60, Bengal Revenue Proceedings, Board of Revenue to Hon. G.H. Barlow, Governor General in Council, Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> 1807.

Cornwallis code of 1793 which specifically banned high posts for natives in administration.<sup>287</sup>

As the last chapter showed, Rammohun was pushing for a re-appraisal of the critically important role of the scribal elite in Company administration. The next section further substantiates this argument by focusing on the post of the *Dewan* in Rangpur and Calcutta from 1765-93 as the historical context of Rammohun's own association with the Rangpur district administration from 1809-14. The working assumption is that an examination of the historical context of the *Dewan* within this framework allows us to gain a perspective of the implications of Rammohun's ideas of the centrality of the native employees.

## **Section two: The post of the *Dewan* in the East India Company's administration in Bengal**

The *Dewan's* post in Company administration was conceptualised in 1766 by the Court of Directors as a response to practical problems in revenue collection which came to light after the grant of the *Dewani* of Bengal from the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II.<sup>288</sup> For example, the Court observed that Company men were 'unfit to collect revenue by themselves' since they were unable to 'follow the subtle native [who] through all arts conceals the real value of the country [and] perseveres [to] elude all payments'.<sup>289</sup> This observation emphasised an important anxiety: on the one hand, the Company had superseded the Bengal *Nawabs* as the *Dewan* of Shah Alam II. On

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<sup>287</sup> Franklin and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The Imperial Years* (Chapel Hill, ii, 1980), 89.

<sup>288</sup> Harry Verelst, *A View of the Rise and Progress of the English Government in Bengal* (London 1772), 427.

<sup>289</sup> Verelst, *English Government in Bengal*, 427.

the other hand, Company officials clearly lacked the resources and know-how of a *Dewan*.

The solution to the problem was the allotment of the role to a body of native employees instead who could perform the tasks of the *Dewan*. The post was not however conceptualised as a continuation of a *Nawabi* post but altered to suit the commercial interests of the Company. The Court of Directors observed that while 'previously' the *Dewan* had been the 'chief financial officer' who calculated the amount to be sent to Delhi and the allocated the remainder to the *Nizamat* in Bengal; this gave too much power to the *Dewan*. Instead they opined that:

We conceive the office of the *Dewan* should be exercised only in superintending collection and disposal of revenues which though vested in the Company should be officially executed through our resident [and] Governor-General in Council.<sup>290</sup>

Thus the *Dewan* was neither an old native employee of the *Nawab* or a Company man.

The ambiguities of this post were further deepened by the rapidly changing political climate in Bengal. In 1766, the Company's government in Bengal shared power with the *Naib Dewan* of Murshidabad, Mohammed Reza Khan. This arrangement had been negotiated by Robert Clive as 'dual monarchy'.<sup>291</sup> Under this set up, the Company collected revenues but 'the administration of justice, the appointment of officers, *Zamindars*, in short whatever comes under the dominion of civil government' was under the charge of Reza Khan. Within a short period however, this context changed. In 1771, 'dissatisfied with the administration of Reza Khan as far as the influence he

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<sup>290</sup> Verelst, *English Government in Bengal*, 427.

<sup>291</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, 1765-1803, Notes on the Bengal *Nawabs* and papers concerning administrative matters, Notes on Muhammad Reza Khan, 183-200.

holds in that position', the Court of Directors, 'divested him of that rank'.<sup>292</sup> This signified a new context in Bengal where the Company was in charge of civil administration. Although the Court of Directors commented on these changed circumstances by reminding the Company at Bengal that 'the collection of revenues was without question the first objective of Government' we find that when the Company introduced a new revenue settlement system in 1773, neither the Court nor the Committee of Revenue in Calcutta outlined a system of how revenue collection was to take place. This can be seen in the Committee of Revenue's summary of Company policy regarding collections in the districts:

The Hon. Court of Directors declare their determination to stand forth as *Dewan* and by the agency of the Company servants take upon themselves the entire care and management of the revenue. By what means this agency is to be exercised we are not instructed. The Committee then acknowledged the confidence of the Court in the abilities of the Committee and drew the assumption that the Court of Directors intend to leave full details to 'the man on the spot'.<sup>293</sup>

The Company's policy to shift the responsibility of revenue collection to the Collector was a fundamental weakness in the system of revenue collection. This is because 'leaving the details' to the man on the spot also meant ignoring his complaints. This can be seen from the following case. In 1770, the first collector of Rangpur, John Grose was alerted to severe problems in revenue administration when his colleague George Robertson reported that the *Dewan* was attempting to dismantle the network of

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<sup>292</sup> IOR/H/584, 1765-1803, Notes on the Bengal *Nawabs* and papers concerning administrative matters, Notes on Muhammad Reza Khan, 183-200.

<sup>293</sup> Quoted in R.B. Ramsbotham, *Studies in the Revenue Administration of Bengal, 1769-1787* (Oxford, 1926), 12.

revenue collection in the district by ensuring that village accountant's (*Patwari*) records for revenue collection were not made available to him. Grose immediately forwarded Robertson's correspondence to his superior, the resident in Murshidabad:

On my arrival at this place [Rangpur], finding it in vain to procure the accounts from people left here and having no alternative, I resolved to procure some of the *Patwari* [village accountant] papers. [...] I judge that this is the proper place to begin procuring the [revenue] accounts from. I have only been able to procure the accounts from one village [...] Had I been lucky enough to get hold of the whole of these papers, I should have been able to get a complete and correct *Hustabood* [gross revenue estimate of the district] but my intentions have been frustrated by the abilities and foresight of the *Aumil* [assistant in revenue collection] and [...] the *Dewan*. Their scheme to prevent your attaining knowledge of the country or real value was so deeply laid that the very *malals* [native officials] of the villages who transacted the business of former years have been dismissed from their employment. Papers have been secreted or destroyed.<sup>294</sup>

Robertson's report was a strong call for regulating the *Dewan's* post and instituting a formal system of native employee administration in Rangpur. Reports such as these were however ignored by Calcutta. The bureaucracy in Calcutta did not therefore regulate the post in spite of receiving damaging reports from its own officials.

Calcutta's responses to its Collectors improved by the end of the decade, but not much. This can be seen in the case of Richard Goodlad, the collector of Rangpur who complained to the Calcutta in 1779, about his *Dewan*, Ganga Prasad:

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<sup>294</sup> *Bengal Record Room, Bengal district records, Rangpur, 1770-1789*, ed. W.K. Firminger (Calcutta, i, 1914), 6-7.

I wrote to him [Ganga Prasad] that several *Zamindars* were in balance [debt] and should have their lands sold. This he has not done till this day [nearly two months] though they are still in arrears. He has been very negligent of his business ever since his appointment [as *Dewan*] seldom coming to the *Kutcheri* [revenue office], owing I believe to his being superseded by me in office.<sup>295</sup>

Goodlad had described a breakdown in the everyday work of the revenue office. He also cited an ambiguous hierarchy. Ganga Prasad was clearly annoyed at not being appointed Collector instead. Purling opined that this was the main reason why Prasad did not pay any attention to revenue collection rates of the Company.

Ganga Prasad however did not agree to this version of events. He argued that Goodlad did not have the know-how and information about the state of revenue collection in Rangpur to realise that the demands for revenue were unrealistic. Ganga Prasad justified this to Purling in a letter explaining the condition of the *Zamindars* of Fatehpur and Baichantpur in Rangpur:

You have ordered me to [collect revenue] from the *Parganas* [a revenue unit of land comprising several villages] Baichantpur, Fatehpur and Coondy. The Fatehpur *Zamindars* say that they cannot pay the revenue at present but they will sell such a quantity of land as to make it up. They have paid but a small quantity of the *Maug Kist* [instalment] and there is so much [more] due [...] I have written to the *Zamindar* of Baichantpur reprehending him for his misconduct [in not paying revenue]. He answered that he will by being allowed a little, pay the whole but I am not satisfied he will pay it.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Rangpur district records, i, ed. Firminger, 72.

<sup>296</sup> Rangpur District Records, i. ed. Firminger, 72.



Goodlad did not respond to Ganga Prasad's arguments. Instead, he wrote to Calcutta and asked for warrants against Ganga Prasad and the *Zamindars*. Calcutta responded but when the warrants arrived in Rangpur, Ganga Prasad made himself scarce:

[Ever] since warrants have been granted against the Rangpur people, he [Ganga Prasad] has made a pretence to keep himself in the house and the *Zamindars* will keep back the rents as they are not pressed by the proper authority or perhaps know that Ganga Prasad's absence is designed to increase the disturbance occasioned by the warrants issued by the Supreme Court.<sup>297</sup>

At first, matters moved quickly. Calcutta suspended Ganga Prasad and began investigating the charges against him. When Goodlad discovered that Prasad was also involved in financial irregularities and complained to Calcutta, fresh warrants were issued against Ganga Prasad. However the process halted after Ganga Prasad fled Rangpur. In a surprising turn of events, the new Collector of Rangpur, George Bogle clearly disregarded his predecessor's experiences and requested for Ganga Prasad's appointment as *Dewan* in 1782. What was even more surprising was that Committee of Revenue confirmed Prasad as *Dewan* of Rangpur (without mentioning the charges against him or his previous warrants). Instead, the Committee simply wrote to Bogle that:

On your representation we have restored Ganga Prasad to his office of *Dewan* of Rangpur.<sup>298</sup>

Calcutta's lukewarm response to problems regarding the *Dewan* and their refusal to regulate the post can also be seen in cases in Calcutta itself. In 1778 the Calcutta

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<sup>297</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, i, ed. Firminger, 71.

<sup>298</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, ii, ed. Firminger, 56.

Committee found itself to be divided over the right of its *Dewan*, Radhakanta Ghosh to imprison defaulters of revenue without prior orders:

[Although] the rights of the *Dewan* to imprison on the balance of the *Toujee* [revenue account showing the amount of monthly instalments for each payer of revenue for a particular area] was asserted and supported [in the court], the evidence [...] was not of one opinion and the chief of the committee [of Calcutta] being strongly against it, the Court left it to him and gave it as their opinion that the *Dewan* had no right to imprison without the order of Committee or the Chief.<sup>299</sup>

This case is similar to Goodlad's complaint against Ganga Prasad's ambiguous attitude to the predominance of the Company official but with a significant difference. While Goodlad had *complained* against Prasad's perceived over-reach, the Calcutta Committee *debated* whether Ghosh's actions were a legitimate exercise of administrative discretionary powers. The confusion over the status of the *Dewan's* authority shows that although the post was officially subject to supervision, in practical terms, Company men in Calcutta were confused about how far the *Dewan* was subordinate to them.

An important reason for the confusion could have been the vital financial role of the *Dewan* in every day administration. Even in 1781, significant sums of money sent by Calcutta to the districts whose funds were allocated by the *Dewan*. For example, Goodlad received the following letter from the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta:

We [the Committee of Revenue] have on this day granted a bill of exchange payable at Dinajpur for 5000 rupees [...] and have directed the *Dewan* of Dinajpur to supply you with

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<sup>299</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, i, ed. Firminger, 37.

money sufficient for payment for the bill. We desire you will give a receipt to the *Dewan* that he may transmit to us the *challans* [receipts] of remittance.<sup>300</sup>

Thus the only regulation over the *Dewan* was the necessity of providing Calcutta with a receipt (*challan*). However *Dewans* were not always prompt with receipts, records and accounts. In 1784 for instance, the Superintendent of the *Zamindari Daftar* (*Zamindari* court), Francis Goodwin wrote an urgent letter to the Collector of Dinajpur, Peter Moore that the *Dewan* had not transmitted any record but ‘given excuses’:

Lakikant the *Dewan* appointed by the *Zamindari Daftar* for the management of the Dinajpur [...] has not transmitted me any accounts for some months past and pleads in excuse that [the *Zamindar* of Dinajpur and a Company appointee] Janakiram Singh refuses to let him exercise his office in any shape. I shall esteem it a favour if you enquire into the state of the case and take the trouble to report the same to me and if it shall appear that any arrears in salary are due to Lakikant I request you to assist in recovering them.<sup>301</sup>

Thus, Lakikant was not an external agent but had been appointed by Goodwin himself. Goodwin’s letter showed that he strongly suspected the *Dewan*, but was powerless to take any action.

Peter Moore’s position as Collector was not however any better than Goodwin’s. This can be seen from the following case. In the aftermath of the bitter and disastrous Rangpur rebellion of 1783, Moore had depended on a certain Roopnarain Ghose, and requested the conformation of his appointment as *Dewan*:

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<sup>300</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, ii, ed. Firminger, 130.

<sup>301</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, iii, ed. Firminger, 182.

Having in the course of my negotiations informing the present years settlement and *examining* other public documents in the country [local] languages and being under a necessity of deriving a great assistance from Roopnarain Ghose a young man of ability on whom I can implicitly rely on for due observance and execution of your orders in the office of *Dewan* to this station, permit me to recommend him to your favour and request that you will be pleased [...] to confirm him in the appointment.<sup>302</sup>

Although Ghose subsequently became *Dewan* in 1784, Moore departed for his furlough soon afterwards. Interestingly, the Ghose was re-employed as *Dewan* by the next Collector and remained in office for the next three years. This proved disastrous for the *Zamindars*.

In 1787, the *Zamindars* of Rangpur (through their legal representatives or *vakeels*) directly petitioned the Governor-General Charles Cornwallis that Ghose had unilaterally increased revenue rates to high amounts and begun to take a range of actions such as confinement and destruction of property to realise revenue collections without any prior sanction from Calcutta. The petition complained that:

Roopnarain Ghose confined the *Zamindars* who complained to him by force and did everything to distress them by severities and brought them almost to the state of ruin. He also sent for *Sezawals* [native revenue collection officials employed by the Collectorate] in different *Parganas* who found [Roopnarain's] *Tahoot* [revenue lease] unjustified and destroyed property without assigning any reason or authority from Government.<sup>303</sup>

Calcutta responded to the petition and John Shore, the President of the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta wrote to the Collector of Rangpur, D.H. McDowall demanding an

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<sup>302</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, iv, ed. Firminger, 173.

<sup>303</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, vi, ed. Firminger, 62.

explanation. McDowall however defended Ghose by arguing that the revenue records of Rangpur showed that the revenue demands on *Zamindars* were not excessive and further recommended that the *Zamindari* lands be auctioned off to realise revenue.

McDowall opined that:

I am persuaded that they [*Zamindars*] have not the smallest claim to it [remission of revenue from the Government] and to [...] defeat the object they have in view [...] a set of falsified *Muffasal* papers is to be produced when the occasion might require them. I have also learnt that it is upon the strength of these papers that they have rendered me a *Muffasal* investigation [...] To convince them [*Zamindars*] of my determination not to submit to the imposition which they are endeavouring to put on me, I order that the lands of Rangpur be instantly advertised to farm and any person wishing to become a farmer be required to deliver his proposals within five days [...]<sup>304</sup>

Although McDowall had effectively defended his *Dewan* against his superiors in Calcutta, Shore was not however convinced with the response to the *Zamindars* petition and noted that since Ghose had been 'entrusted' with making the settlement of revenue, the records could have been manipulated by him.<sup>305</sup> Shore's observation shows the degree to which the man-on-the spot in Rangpur was still as dependent on the *Dewan* for details concerning revenue collection as the first collector, John Gross had been 17 years ago. Additionally, as President of the Revenue Committee, it likely that Shore also knew that collectors in Rangpur had changed thrice in as many years but Ghose's appointment as *Dewan* had remained intact. Soon afterwards, Cornwallis personally intervened to involve the preparer of the reports of the Revenue

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<sup>304</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, vi, ed. Firminger, 62.

<sup>305</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, vi. ed. Firminger, 130.

Department, Jonathan Duncan.<sup>306</sup> After consulting the *Kanungos* (revenue accountants), Duncan wrote to McDowall informing him that the amount of extra revenue had been excused by the Government.<sup>307</sup> Thus the *Zamindars'* petition was accepted by the Government at Calcutta but *against* the opinion on the most important Company official in the district, the Collector.

The above narrative clearly shows the lack of regulation concerning the *Dewan* by Calcutta in spite of the cases against them. It also highlights the personal intervention of two of the most powerful Company men in Bengal at the time, the Governor-General Lord Cornwallis and the President of the Committee of Revenue, John Shore. One reason why Shore acted against McDowall was his assessment of the *Dewan's* post as 'a source of 'immense power and means of mischief':

This man in fact the *Dewan* or executive officer has all the revenues paid at the Presidency at his disposal and if he has any abilities bring all the renters under contribution. It is of little advantage to restrain the Committee themselves of bribery or corruption when their executive officers have the power of practicing both undetected. He discovers the secret resources of the *Zamindars* and their renters, their enemies and competitors and by engines of hope and fear raised upon these foundations he can work them to his person.<sup>308</sup>

Shore's assessment of the *Dewan* did not translate into Company policy. Although the proceedings of the Revenue Committee in Calcutta were forwarded to London, the Court did not acknowledge that any regulations were needed. This was not an oversight, but a deliberate policy. For example, in 1787, the Court of Directors

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<sup>306</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, vi, ed. Firminger, 130.

<sup>307</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, vi, ed. Firminger, 130.

<sup>308</sup> Charles John Shore Teignmouth, *Memoir of the life and correspondence of Lord Teignmouth* (London, i, 1843), 74.

introduced 'Regulations for Collectors in the Bengal Presidency'. The *Dewan* could 'hear, receive, *examine* and decide complaints or petitions' only when 'authorised' by the Collector.<sup>309</sup> This Regulation, in spite of its claim to being an updated policy only echoed the Calcutta Committee of Revenue's regulation in 1773:

A native *Dewan* is [...] fit to serve as a cloak to operate as a check on any European collector.<sup>310</sup>

This indicates a long term policy of official silence from London and Calcutta on regulating the *Dewan*. Officials in Calcutta did not pressurise London to introduce regulations either. This was probably because the official silence on the *Dewan* was useful to maintain revenue collections. For example, in the takeover of the French factories in 1786, the Company agreed to continue 'the custom of jurisdiction between the *Dewan* and the Ryot' and decreed that 'there shall be no innovation in this respect'.<sup>311</sup> The *Dewan* of the French East India Company would therefore continue to perform his role *without any changes* solely because of his commercial usefulness to the English East India Company.

This policy was being followed at a time when the most disastrous case yet involving a *Dewan* had come to light. The case involved the *Dewan* of the Committee of Revenue in Calcutta, Ganga Gobind Singh. Singh was an extraordinarily powerful native employee. P.J. Marshall opined that Singh 'certainly wielded more power than any other Indian was to do before the twentieth century'.<sup>312</sup> Singh was also close to Warren Hastings and reportedly, 'the only man whom Hastings trusts'.<sup>313</sup> The

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<sup>309</sup> *General regulations, for the conduct of the collectors, in the Revenue Department. Passed by the Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council, on the 8th June, 1787* (Calcutta, 1787), 1-23.

<sup>310</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, v, ed. Firminger, 70.

<sup>311</sup> *Rangpur District Records*, v, ed. Firminger, 103.

<sup>312</sup> Marshall, 'Indian Officials', 111.

<sup>313</sup> Marshall, 'Indian Officials', 112.

connection with Hastings bore rich dividends. By the time of the case against him, Singh's wealth was estimated to be 320 lakh rupees.<sup>314</sup>

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1785, Singh, his son Prankrishen (as *Naib Dewan* or deputy) and an associate Ghulam Ashraf were charged with forgery of revenue documents, embezzlement of government revenues and land fraud in Dinajpur.<sup>315</sup> The Committee concluded that Ganga Gobind had 'an intention to defraud the government annually of Rs. 42,274' and recommended that the *Dewan* be jailed.<sup>316</sup> Crucially, the Committee insisted that the post of the *Dewan* be henceforth regulated:

If it was thought necessary to appoint *Dewans* with so much power, they ought not to be suffered to continue for more than two or three years'.<sup>317</sup>

This was a significant observation. By his own account, Singh had occupied the *Dewan* of Calcutta's post for long periods- 1766-8, 1773-8 and 1780-5.<sup>318</sup> The charges as well as a call to regulate the post of *Dewan* was however not accepted by the Governor-General, Macpherson who cited lack of evidence against the *Dewan* and *Naib Dewan*.

<sup>319</sup> The case against Ashraf however continued and was sent to London on appeal. This however also reopened the case of Ganga Gobind Singh and Prankrishen.

Consequently, the Court of Directors ordered the release of Ghulam Ashraf but did not

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<sup>314</sup> Marshall, 'Indian Officials', 112.

<sup>315</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on the Bengal *Nawabs* and papers concerning administrative matters Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan* and *Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>316</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan* and *Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>317</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan* and *Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>318</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan* and *Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>319</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan* and *Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.



offer an opinion on the *Dewan* and *Naib Dewan* and left it to the Bengal government.<sup>320</sup> Calcutta however did not conduct any fresh proceedings but again cited the lack of evidence.<sup>321</sup>

In spite on such high profile and damaging cases, the Cornwallis code of 1793 did not contain any particular regulations against the *Dewan*. This was probably because the Company at Calcutta had begun to dis-engage with its officials in the districts on all matters pertaining to the *Dewan*. However this did not mean that Company officials at Calcutta did not have any particular perspective *Dewan*. As the memoirs of George Valentia show, Company bureaucrats in the city had a very definite perception of what *Dewans* were capable of, in 1803.<sup>322</sup> Valentia was a traveller and guest of Lord Cornwallis at Calcutta. His account of the official conception of the *Dewan* reveals a mental perception of a dominant native employee with resources and know-how and the Company man as a gullible outsider:

Young men on their arrival in India with no greater degree of experience than usual fall into the lot of school boys, in full possession of a full and splendid income in the expenditure of which they are absolutely uncontrolled. [...] To support this manner of living they are compelled to borrow large sums from the *Dewan* who is frequently a native of rank and acts as a species of upper-servant.<sup>323</sup>

Company officials at Calcutta perceived *Dewan* as a *person in a position of power* who cheated the Company men (whose potential to be gullible is expressed with reference

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<sup>320</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan and Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>321</sup> IOR, H/584, Home Miscellaneous, Notes on Ganga Govind Singh and Pran Kishen, *Diwan and Naib Diwan* to the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta 1785-89. pp. 97-112, 599-660.

<sup>322</sup> Viscount George Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, Abyssinia and Egypt* (London, i, 1803), 26-7.

<sup>323</sup> Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 26-7.

to their youth). The *Dewan* however did not only lend money but negotiated an ambiguous official employment by blackmail. On the *Dewan*, Valentia noted:

These men deeply immersed in the mazes of Oriental subtlety gradually insinuate themselves in favour of their masters and by encouraging their follies and eventually succeed getting into their own hands the sole management of the writer's affairs. While the young man remains in the inferior situation the debt to the *Dewan* continues to increase from additional advances and rapid accumulation of interest and when the higher appointments at length become open, it takes years to clear off the embarrassments incurred by early extravagance. It is fortunate if in the eagerness to free himself from his encumbrances he be not induced to connive at the misconduct of the *Dewan* and even to participate in the illegal profits with which the latter is ever ready to allure him. Thus originates the young man's dependence on the *Dewan*.<sup>324</sup>

The point that Company officials at Calcutta stressed was native corruption. While officials at Calcutta constructed an image of a *Dewan* who fooled Company servants and embezzled Company revenues, this perception can also be read as a different take on the fluid networks of communication between the Company men and the *Dewan* which had been an important part of Digby's letters to the Board. We see in Valentia's account a very different interpretation of the same network that was championed by Digby.

Valentia's record of official opinions in Calcutta regarding the *Dewan* sheds light on why Rammohun's personal association with Digby would have been viewed with suspicion by the Board of Revenue. It also explains why the Board instituted a rigid bureaucratic surveillance on its officials in the early-nineteenth century and had begun

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<sup>324</sup> Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 26-7.

to recommend their choice of *Dewan* to the Company men in the districts. We note that the Board did not regulate the *post* of *Dewan*. Rather, it introduced a system of a background check on the *individual* occupying the post. Thus, Digby's letter of dissent against the appointment of the Board's choice of *Dewan*, Nawal Kishore Sen, highlighted Sen's previous convictions at the Murshidabad court as a mockery of the Board's methods.

Calcutta's perception of the *Dewan* hardened during the period of Cornwallis' tenure in government. This can be seen by taking into account the differences between Shore's perception in 1787 and Valentia's account of official ideas of the *Dewan* in 1803. Shore's ideas of the *Dewan* was that the post required regulation. Valentia wrote of the *Dewan* as an unscrupulous *being*. The implication of this was not only that the post of *Dewan* ought to be abolished but that all higher posts for natives as well. Interestingly, both views prevailed when the post was abolished in 1813. The Board of Revenue opined:

The chief object of the measure is to annihilate the influence of the Head native officers and the nature of the situation in many instances which enabled the *Dewans* to exert with the most pernicious effect. Under the Present system the *Dewan* [...] exercises a general control of the business which we fear in many instances may induce the Collector to be satisfied with a great slight and casual inspection and we are persuaded that this to a great measure is the reason for the want of an efficiency which we have been sorry to observe in some cases.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> *Circular Orders of the Sudder Board of Revenue at the Presidency of Fort William including the rules of practice for the guidance of the Board and of the Commissioners of Revenue together with a selection from the circular and standing orders of the late Board of Revenue from the year 1788 to the end of August 1837, selected by the Board*, ed. William Peters (Calcutta, 1838), 21.

The previous regulations on the *Dewan* had introduced a rigid top down perception of the *Dewan* in districts from the point of view of London. This was the first ever regulation in which the post of *Dewan* was seen from the point of view of everyday governance in the districts. The assessments of the problem seemed to take Shore's perspective of the *Dewan's* post having access to too much administrative power in 1787. The solution to the problem however was an echo of later Company officials in Calcutta in 1803 who wanted to 'annihilate the influence' of the *Dewan*. The Regulation ordered that the responsibilities of the *Dewan* be instead distributed amongst subordinate native officials:

[Henceforth] the business of the treasury will be performed by [...] several departments without any native Head Ministerial officer. There will be an absolute necessity for the Collector's superintending the conduct of the whole.<sup>326</sup>

The question now arises is that if the regulations had been so clearly outlined, then why were the Board still interested in controlling the *Dewan's* post in 1814 when it had officially ceased to exist? The answer most likely is that the regulation had not taken into account that the practical problems in revenue collection which had led to the creation of *Dewan's* post in 1766 had continued through the late-eighteenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the Board of Revenue was forced to acknowledge the importance of the *Dewan* in spite of the grievances of their top officials.

To Rammohun, the outgoing informal *Dewan* at Rangpur, privy to Digby's public correspondence and knowledgeable of the revenue regulations; the Board of

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<sup>326</sup> *Circular Orders of the Sudder Board of Revenue*, ed. Peters, 21.

Revenue's acceptance of the *Dewan's* existence even after abolishing the post was a tacit acknowledgement of the continuing importance of not only the *Dewan* but all native employees in district administration. This was the context of Rammohun's association with the Company in 1814.

The importance of this context can be found in the *Exposition*. Rammohun argued that native employees were crucial to the Company administration throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. This chapter shows that Rammohun's emphasis was justified. From the very inception of Company administration in Bengal in 1765, Governor-Generals in Calcutta, the Court of Directors in London, and Collectors in the districts were only too aware of the important (and ambiguous) role of the *Dewan*.

## **Conclusion**

Rammohun's period of association with the Company from 1802-14 was witness to two simultaneous processes: first, the official discourse from Calcutta which gradually abolished high posts for native officials and second, the continuing employment of native employees in the districts in posts which had been abolished. The *Exposition* therefore emphasised the importance of the creation of a native employee service with its own networks of hierarchy, administrative power and pay and strongly suggested the need for high salaries amongst all native employees and a system of internal promotions.

Rammohun's emphasis on a system of promotions implied a radical transformation of the native service within a single structure of payment and eligibility. Thus Rammohun's ideas were not restricted to high ranking officials such as *Dewans*

(revenue assistant to the District Collector), *Kanungos* (revenue accountants), *Amils* (the Indian predecessor of the European collector), *Sezawals* (assistants in revenue collecting), *Naibs* and *Sheristedars* (Deputies of the *Dewan* and *Kanungos*), but *all* natives who worked in the Company such as the clerical staff (*Naiks*, *Mohururs* and Persian *Mohururs*).

Rammohun's emphasis on the importance of the native employee throughout the Company's administration was shaped by the diversity of his experiences with Company administration at different tiers of governance: provincial capitals (Murshidabad and Benares), districts (Decca-Jelalpur, Jessore, Ramgarh and Bhagalpur) and frontier territories (Rangpur) for 11-12 years in formal and informal capacities (as a private *Munshi*, Acting *Sheristedar* and *Dewan*). This was the most likely context of the consistent references to 'experiences' cited in the *Exposition* to support his assertion that the process of Company governance was inefficient and expensive and harmed the Company's accountability to the natives.<sup>327</sup>

Rammohun did not however advocate reform based on only his period of association with the Company but with a system of government in an earlier phase of Company rule (1784-93). As the last chapter explained, this was the only period which was assessed positively in the *Exposition*:

The system of rule acted upon in India [from 1784] to 1793 was of a mixed nature- European and Asiatic. The established usages of the country were adopted for the most part as a model

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<sup>327</sup> Rammohun was associated with the Company at Murshidabad for two years whilst a private *Munshi* to Woodforde (1802- February 1803). This can be surmised from his appointment as Woodford's *Dewan* in March 1803 and at Benares for 3 months (May-July 1803). He worked with Digby as private *Munshi* from 1805-9 and as *Dewan* from 1809-14. This is how the total period of Rammohun's association is approximated as between eleven and twelve years.

of their conduct in the discharge of political, revenue and judicial functions with modifications at the discretion of local authority.<sup>328</sup>

From his vantage point as the last generation of *Dewans* of the old scribal elite, Rammohun's argument was a case for a government run by native employees educated in older scribal traditions but in a systems of government in Bengal which had been introduced by the Company.

The viability of Rammohun's argument lay in its emphasis on economy. He argued that it was possible for the Company at London to save significant expenditure by doing away with Company officials (such as revenue commissioners) in revenue administration altogether. In the place of an overpaid, inefficient and disproportionately powerful single Collector, Rammohun proposed a cost-effective *system* of administration by regulated native employees.

Rammohun's association with the Company showed the importance of the native employee to the Company. But as this chapter has stressed, Rammohun was also born into a family of native employees and emphasised his scribal background, his education in Arabic and Persian and his interest in governance and accountability.

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the Company employed large numbers of scribes in their administration. Rammohun's discussions of the importance native employees however referred not only to their administrative importance but also signified their central role in his political thought. As the last chapter showed, there is strong evidence of this in the *Exposition*. For example, the *Exposition*

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<sup>328</sup> *Exposition*, xiii.

suggested ways in which native employees could occupy high posts in government and have an important role in rural political organisations such as the *Panchayat*.

The *Exposition* was written in 1831 in London, for a British readership. Rammohun's political thought was also articulated for a Bengali audience in other writings such as the *Tuhfat al-Muwahhidin* and tracts on Hindu scripture. The *Tuhfat al-Muwahhidin* and tracts on Hindu scripture did not however only repeat the arguments of the *Exposition*. Rather they were concerned with a distinct but related project- ethics. Rammohun's political thought in the *Tuhfat and* writings on Hindu scripture are the subject of the next chapter.



## Chapter three: The *Tuḥfat al-Muwahḥidīn* and writings on Hindu scripture: Rammohun's ideas of religion and ethics.

### Introduction

The previous chapters showed that Rammohun's political thought was concerned with the ways in which the Company could be made accountable to its subjects in India and that native employees were core to his ideas of good governance. Rammohun's ideas were not however restricted to native employees. He made extensive use of the print medium to produce tracts which stressed that the 'public' in Bengal could also be involved in governance.

What Rammohun meant by the use of the term 'public' can be seen in his reference to it in Bengali writings (such as *Reply to a Bhaṭṭācāryya*, for example).<sup>329</sup> In Bengali, Rammohun translated the term, 'public' as *sarvvasadharan lok*.<sup>330</sup> The term *sarvvasadharan lok* literally translates to 'ordinary people' (or quite simply, *everyone*) in Bengali society. Implicit in Rammohun's use of this term is the assumption that the *sarvvasadharan lok* would be interested in his tracts (and perhaps even respond to them). However, this assumption seems misleading when one considers that *everyone* in Bengali society was by no means print-literate at this point.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Reply to a Bhaṭṭācāryya* (*Bhaṭṭācāryyer sahit vicār*) was published in Bengali in Calcutta. Rammohun also translated it into English and published it as *Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas*. We note that *Bhaṭṭācāryyer sahit vicār* referred to *sarvvasadharan lok* and *Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas* translated the term as 'the public'. Both tracts were published in 1817.

<sup>330</sup> Pradyumna Bhattacharya, 'Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose' in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (Delhi, 1975), 202.

<sup>331</sup> P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740-1828* (Cambridge, 1987), 30. The literacy rates amongst adult males in the 1830's were estimated to be between 9-2.3 % depending upon the districts. Amongst adult females the rates were estimated to be considerably lower.

Rammohun's use of the term *sarvvasadharan lok* was however based on a particular context. As recent research on the history of the book (by Anindita Ghosh) and the circulation of information (by Christopher Bayly) has shown, the public sphere in early-nineteenth-century Bengal was not defined by a print-literate audience but rather by a diversity of oral practices, performance narratives and traditions of reading aloud.<sup>332</sup> Thus, printed works in the early-nineteenth century was not only read *by* people but also read *out* to others. Further 'a great deal of information' from the printed newspapers and tracts was passed on by travelling news writers who went to *bazaars*, markets and even 'from house to house' by reading aloud from printed works.<sup>333</sup> In 1820's for example, roughly 5000-10,000 people in Bengal had a 'direct exposure' to the print medium via these traditions of orality.<sup>334</sup> And, as Bayly noted, this was a 'conservative' estimate.<sup>335</sup>

According to Francesca Orsini, South-Asian historians have only recently begun to acknowledge the presence of parallel traditions of orality and print in early-modern and early-colonial South Asia.<sup>336</sup> In this context, V Narayan Rao has coined the term 'oral-literate' to describe the writers, storytellers and bards whose ideas appealed to both written and oral traditions.<sup>337</sup> Drawing from the perspectives of Ghosh, Bayly and Rao, I argue that Rammohun was 'oral literate' and the 'public' or *sarvvasadharan lok*

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<sup>332</sup> Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print, Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905* (New Delhi, 2006); C.A. Bayly, *Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 2000) and C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>333</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 79.

<sup>334</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 79.

<sup>335</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 79.

<sup>336</sup> Francesca Orsini, 'Introduction' in Francesca Orsini (ed.) *The History of the Book in South Asia* (London, 2013), i.

<sup>337</sup> Cited in Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xiv.

referred to a population well-versed in oral traditions (such as that of story-telling and reading aloud for example).

In this context we note that a consistent feature of Rammohun's writings in Bengali was that they were short tracts. This is because short tracts could be easily circulated. The *circulation* of material was key to the success of his project since it would generate interest in his works as well as socialise his readership to print. As Stuart Black argued, printing presses had a 'limited' impact in Indian society until they were 'socialised' in the vernacular languages by the general population.<sup>338</sup> I argue that through his works, Rammohun hoped to socialise his readership into using print to hold the Company accountable through newspapers, in petitions and letters. It was in *this* way that the Bengali public would be involved in the process of governance.<sup>339</sup>

Rammohun's argument for the greater involvement of Bengali society in Company administration was based on an important assumption: that the public were ethical. Ethics was a core concern in Rammohun's writings. This chapter will highlight his case for ethical practice in Bengali society. There are a number of questions that can be raised in the context of this argument. First, in which tract did Rammohun first articulate his ideas of ethics? Second, what according to him was 'ethics'? Third, was he influenced by any particular philosophical tradition? Fourth, were his ideas influenced by a specific text of ethics?

In response to the above questions, I argue the following: First, Rammohun's ideas of ethics first appeared in the *Tuhfat al-Muwahhidin* (a gift to the believers of one God) a

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<sup>338</sup> Cited in Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xvii.

<sup>339</sup> Throughout the chapter I use the terms *sarvvasadharan lok*, public, and Bengali society interchangeably in order to stress that they mean the same and are a part of a single project.

short Perso-Arabic tract written in 1803 in Murshidabad.<sup>340</sup> Second, according to Rammohun, 'ethics' referred to the reinterpretation of religious practices as *everyday ethical practices*. On this basis, he rejected all rituals and religious leaders and systematically interpreted religious scripture as an argument for ethical practice. Third, he was influenced by the philosophical tradition of *akhlāq*. Fourth, his ideas of ethical practice was influenced by the best known text of *akhlāq*, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* (1235).<sup>341</sup>

The readership and reception of the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn*'s ideas of ethics was however restricted to a native elite familiar with Perso-Arabic intellectual traditions.

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<sup>340</sup> My interpretation of the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* in the thesis depends almost entirely on the English translation of the text made by Obaidullah el Obaide in 1883. Obaide's translation is referred widely in current scholarship (used for example, by Dermot Killingley, Bruce Robertson, Sumit Sarkar and Brian Hatcher). However the use of Obaide's translation may also lead to problems in interpretation. This is because Obaide did not provide detailed transliteration, explanatory notes or place the *Tuḥfat* in its intellectual context. To temper some of the difficulties that might arise in this situation, I have compared Obaide's version with J.C. Ghosh's English translation of the *Tuḥfat*. Ghosh's translation is also used in current scholarship (such as by Andrew Sartori, for example). Ghosh disagreed with Obaide only very slightly, but all points of disagreement between Obaide and Ghosh have been taken into account. Further, Obaide's reference to, and translation of, Persian and Arabic words has also been compared with Francis Joseph Steingass's *Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary*. We note that since Steingass also included Arabic words which frequently occur in Persian literature, the *Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary* is an invaluable point of reference for the interpretation of a Perso-Arabic text such as the *Tuḥfat*. In this way, the broad arguments of the *Tuḥfat* are recovered and interpreted.

<sup>341</sup> Nasir ad-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M Wickens (London, 1964), 9. I have used G.M. Wickens' translation of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* throughout the chapter. Wickens produced a standard English translation of the text based on six extant manuscripts and editions- (1) the Lucknow edition of 1952 available at the Oriental Institute, Cambridge, (2) the Lucknow lithograph of 1891, available at Cambridge University Library, (3) the Tehran edition, undated but modern, available at the Institute for Islamic Studies, McGill University, (4) the Lahore edition of 1955 (also at Cambridge), (5) an MS. dated 1645, loaned by P.W. Avery, Faculty of the Department of Persian at Cambridge and (6) selections of the text by Jalal ad-Din Humai in Tehran.

Wickens' translation has been well received in current scholarship. See for instance Michel M. Mazzaoui, 'Review: The Nasirean Ethics by Nasir Ad-Din Tusi by G. M. Wickens and Nasir Ad-Din Tusi', *American Oriental Society*, 4(1967), 617. Mazzaoui opined that: 'Readers of the translation could wish for no better accomplished scholar to render Tusi into English. Professor Wickens is admirably suited for the task: his knowledge of both Persian and Arabic has served him well, particularly since the Persian of Tusi is studded with Arabicisms; and in any case, a work of this type is perforce full of Arabic technical terminology. Further, Mr. Wickens has included in the notes (pp. 261-333) in transcribed Persian every possibility where the meaning of a particular term is to be referred to or questioned. The system of notation (especially devised by the translator) is structurally elaborate but essentially simple.'

This tract would not have been understood by the *sarvvasadharan lok*. In this context, Rammohun's subsequent writings developed the *Tuḥfat*'s ideas of ethical practice and *explained* them to the Bengali public.

The chapter makes three main arguments: first, that the *Tuḥfat* articulated Rammohun's ideas on ethics and was influenced by *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*; second that the ideas of the *Tuḥfat* influenced later writings on Hindu scripture; and third, that Rammohun had a broad audience in mind for his writings on Hindu scripture. These arguments are however contrary to the ideas of current scholarship. We therefore turn to scholarly disagreements on these points.

To Dermot Killingley, a historian of religion, 'the very idea', that Rammohun's ideas may have interested, informed or been followed by a broad audience 'calls for criticism'.<sup>342</sup> This perspective is also shared by Bruce Robertson (also a historian of religion).<sup>343</sup> Both argue that the main readers and respondents of Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture would have been upper caste members of Hindu society such as *pandits* (Mrityunjay Vidyalankar for example), high officials (William Bentinck for instance was influenced by Rammohun's writings on *Sati*) and Orientalist scholars (such as Horace H. Wilson). This argument is not without context, as we shall see below.

Mrityunjay Vidyalankar (1762-1819) was a Bengali Brahmin, educated in Sanskrit in the district of Midnapore. At the time of Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture in Calcutta, Vidyalankar held the post of the head *pandit* of the Sanskrit Department at

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<sup>342</sup> Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures 1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993), 35.

<sup>343</sup> Bruce C. Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi, 1995), 72.

Fort William College. Earlier, he had been employed as the *munshi* (language teacher) of William Carey, the Professor of Bengali at the same college.<sup>344</sup> As the chapter will show, Vidyalkar was also aware of Rammohun's writings and criticised his interpretation of Hindu scripture. We note that while Vidyalkar was an acknowledged authority in Sanskrit, he had no exposure to the *lingua franca* of the native intellectual elite, Persian. It is possible therefore that Vidyalkar had formed an opinion of Rammohun's writings independently of the *Tuḥfat*.

Horace H. Wilson (1786-1860) was a Company official who had arrived in Calcutta in 1808 as 'an unknown enthusiast of Sanskrit' and begun work in the Hindustani Press. Wilson's interest in Sanskrit soon attracted the notice of scholars in Calcutta.<sup>345</sup> In 1812, he joined the Sanskrit Department at the College of Fort William and by 1819 had established his credentials as a renowned Sanskritist with the publication of a Sanskrit Dictionary.<sup>346</sup> He had a high opinion of Rammohun's scholarship and sought his help with the precise dating and interpretation of the works of the early-medieval Hindu thinker Shankara and with the English translation of the *Purāṇas*.<sup>347</sup>

Wilson also employed the Persian educated Bengali Kayastha Ram Comul Sen (1783-1844) as the head native official of the Hindustani Press.<sup>348</sup> Apart from the Hindustani Press, Sen was also employed by the Bengal Mint. Sen was also associated with the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Hindu College and was a member of the Calcutta School

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<sup>344</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance, the dynamics of Indian Modernisation, 1773-1835* (Berkeley, 1969), 113.

<sup>345</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 167.

<sup>346</sup> In recognition of his Sanskrit scholarship, Wilson was appointed as Professor in the University of Oxford in 1832. He was the first Boden professor of Sanskrit.

<sup>347</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 201.

<sup>348</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 116-9.

Book Society, an elite educational association concerned with the publishing and circulation of text books throughout Bengal.<sup>349</sup> His education in Persian meant that he may have read the *Tuhfat*. Sen was one of Rammohun's most vocal critics, and founded the *Dharma Sabha* to protest against his ideas of *Sati*.<sup>350</sup>

We note that the Killingley and Robertson's arguments concerning Rammohun's readers, well-wishers and critics are rooted in a material context. They are backed up by the textual evidence of Vidyalankar's and Wilson's response/reference to Rammohun's ideas and extensive newspaper evidence of Ram Comul Sen's founding of the *Dharma Sabha*.

Rammohun's stress on the Bengali public was not however without a material context. While it is true that we do not have written documents by the public responding to Rammohun's work, a survey of the contemporary publication data from the period provide a crucial information about the popular reception of his writings. We note in this context that Rammohun published in the popular press (Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya and Lulu ji) as well as elite printing press (the Serampore Press, Hindustani Press and Baptist Mission Press).<sup>351</sup> Drawing on Anindita Ghosh's research on printing presses in nineteenth century Bengal, I argue that Rammohun's publishing preferences reveals an intention to have a broad readership, the elite and the popular.

Ghosh shows that the difference between popular and elite presses was question of taste. The elite presses published books on science, literature, grammar, language and

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<sup>349</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 116-9.

<sup>350</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 116-9.

<sup>351</sup> Ghosh, *Power in Print*, 142.

dictionaries.<sup>352</sup> The popular presses by contrast published 'petty pamphlet literature' on 'fables, farces, almanacs, sensational and low print literature'.<sup>353</sup> Tanika Sarkar in this context has argued that the popular presses posed an alternative value system, and were even motivated by very different social concerns than the elite presses.<sup>354</sup> For instance, Sarkar shows that the popular press' focus on contemporary social scandals was so extensive that by 1870 a sub-genre of 'scandal literature' had come into being.<sup>355</sup> Sarkar thus highlights the definite existence of typologies of 'elite' and 'popular' differentiated by taste.

Ghosh argues that even in the early-nineteenth century, low print works constituted a distinct market in Calcutta (based out of Battala) which did not give any priority to elite literature. Neither did elite literature have any role in regulating the content of low print works and nor did authors and *pandits* associated with elite presses approve of low print literature.<sup>356</sup> Moreover the publications of Battala had a 'brisk trade'.<sup>357</sup> With this argument in mind, we proceed to our argument regarding Rammohun's publications.

As far as my arguments concerning the popular reception of Rammohun's writings is concerned, my main source is the Calcutta School Book Society (CSBS) catalogue of Bengali works published in Calcutta.<sup>358</sup> The catalogue is a record of the titles of Bengali,

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<sup>352</sup> Ghosh, *Power in Print*, 51-2.

<sup>353</sup> Ghosh, *Power in Print*, 107.

<sup>354</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi, 2001), 55.

<sup>355</sup> Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 56.

<sup>356</sup> Ghosh, *Power in Print*, 14-15.

<sup>357</sup> Ghosh, *Power in Print*, 163.

<sup>358</sup> *The Second Report of the Calcutta School Book Society* [CSBS], No. II, Memorandum of the indigenous works which have appeared from the native presses, drawn up for the Calcutta School Book Society Committee by the Corresponding Secretary, (Calcutta, 1820), 38.



Sanskrit and Persian writings produced in Calcutta for popular consumption in 1820 (with the inclusion of information on publishers and pricing wherever available).<sup>359</sup> The CSBS published the catalogue in its *Second Report*. The catalogue included works from popular and elite presses. Our focus here is the Bengali catalogue. All titles were translated into English by Sanskrit *pandits* employed by the CSBS.

The Bengali catalogue contained 65 tracts in all. Almost immediately, Ghosh's perspectives of the difference between elite presses and low print literature comes to the fore. For example, 8 tracts (12.3 % of the Bengali catalogue) had identical English titles since the Sanskrit *pandits* employed by the CSBS refused to translate the titles of low print literature.<sup>360</sup> This is a clear indication of elite disapproval of popular literature. Interestingly, more than half the authors of the Bengali catalogue were anonymous (33 tracts, 50.7 %), which suggests that anonymity was a consistent feature in popular writings in Calcutta at the time.<sup>361</sup> This is especially significant when we consider that by contrast, publications in the elite presses was prestigious and their authors, native and European, were well known intellectuals in Calcuttan society.<sup>362</sup> For instance, Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's works on Bengali history and Ram Comul Sen's *Bengali Dictionary* were published by the elite Srerampore Press.

The prestige and visibility accorded to authors in the elite presses may have also contributed to the choices of Mrityunjay Vidyalankar and Ram Comul Sen to publish *only* in elite presses. In this context, we note that Rammohun's writings was published

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<sup>359</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

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<sup>362</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

by the popular press publishers, Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya and Lulu ji.<sup>363</sup> His works constituted 23 % of the CSBS catalogue of popular works (15 tracts). Further, the catalogue publicly attributed 14 of the 15 tracts to his authorship. This made him the most visibly productive author in the popular press. The catalogue did not only refer to works which had first appeared in 1820 but also older writings such as the *Vedāntasara* (an abridged version of his first Bengali work, *Vedāntagrantha*).<sup>364</sup> Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya and Lulu ji reprinted 1000 copies of the tract in 1820.<sup>365</sup> We note that *Vedāntasara* had initially appeared in 1816 as his second tract in Bengali. The continued reprinting of the tract made it the most widely circulated of his Bengali works in 1820.

The *Vedāntasara* was not the only pre-1820 tract to be reprinted by the popular press. Others tracts by Rammohun which were reprinted in 1820 included *Īśā Upaniṣad*, *Kena Upaniṣad*, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* and *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. *Īśā Upaniṣad* and *Kena Upaniṣad* were also published by Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya and Lulu ji and 1000 copies of each were reprinted.<sup>366</sup> The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* and *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* were published by Lulu Ji and 500 copies of each were reprinted.<sup>367</sup>

We note that although Rammohun's tracts were printed in large numbers, none were priced. I argue that this was a deliberate strategy to promote their distribution and circulation. In *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, Rammohun himself mentioned his (successful) efforts to freely distribute them. This point is significant when we consider that Mrityunjay

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<sup>363</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>364</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>365</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>366</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>367</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

Vidyalankar's *Vedānta Candrikā* (1817) also appears in the catalogue but priced at 1 rupee.<sup>368</sup>

Significantly, *Vedānta Candrikā* was a critique of the *Vedāntasara*. The continuing circulation and reprinting of an expensive tract on religion shows that the Bengali public were certainly interested in the debates around Hindu scripture generated by Rammohun's writings. This argument is bolstered by the fact that 500 copies of Rammohun's counter-response to the *Vedānta Candrikā* (which had also initially appeared in 1817) was also reprinted by Lulu Ji in 1820.<sup>369</sup> The *Vedānta Candrikā* was also reprinted by private publishers in 1851 (priced at 1 rupee) suggesting that public interest in the debate continued well into the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>370</sup>

Rammohun's Bengali writings were reprinted in the mid nineteenth century by the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* (under Debendranath Tagore).<sup>371</sup> The *Tattvabodhini Sabha* press is however an unreliable indicator of the popularity of Rammohun's works since it had a mandate to popularise Rammohun's ideas. In this context we note that Rammohun's works were also reprinted by Indian private publishers. As Orsini has shown, the number of Indian private publishers greatly expanded after the 1835 owing to a more flexible legal framework (a consequence of the Metcalfe Minute of 1835).<sup>372</sup> If we consider the available data from private publishers, the following information emerges: the *Vedāntasara* was reprinted in 1852 for 6 annas and later in the

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<sup>368</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

The conversion of rupees to annas and paise are as follows:

1 rupee = 16 annas.

1 rupee = 4 paise

<sup>369</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>370</sup> *Catalogue of the Vernacular Literature Committee's Library*, compiled by Rev. J. Long (Calcutta, 1855).

<sup>371</sup> Brian Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (New York, 2008), 45.

<sup>372</sup> Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xviii.

nineteenth century (the year is unavailable) for 4 rupees. The *Īśā Upaniṣad* was reprinted in 1839 for 4 annas and the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, in 1840 for 3 annas.<sup>373</sup> Thus, Rammohun's works on Hindu scripture were reprinted, *priced* and sold by private publishers who clearly perceived a market for them.

Orsini has argued that the success of private publishers in the mid-nineteenth century depended on being able to identify works which appealed to an older tradition of oral literacy.<sup>374</sup> This is because such works appealed to a large number of readers. Using Orsini's ideas, I argue that the publication of Rammohun's works by private publishers was due to their reference to a context which readers would have been familiar with—the work of an oral-literate author. Rammohun's *style* of argument was clearly in demand. This argument is further consolidated when we consider the publication and reprinting of the Bengali tract, *Dialogue between a theist and an idolater* (*Brāhma Pauttalik Saṃvād*).

Rammohun originally published *Dialogue between a theist and an idolater* in 1820 under the pseudonym Brajamohun Majumdar. In 1846, it was reprinted by private publishers for 4 annas, but still attributed to Brajamohun Majumdar.<sup>375</sup> A favourable price comparison with the reprints of the *Īśā Upaniṣad* (4 annas, 1839) and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (3 annas, 1840) shows that it was not Rammohun's *name* that prompted the sale of his works, but rather what accounted for their popularity was the *manner in which he made his arguments*.

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<sup>373</sup> See Table 1: Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta, c. 1803-1905, 348-358.

<sup>374</sup> Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xiv. Discussed earlier in a discussion of the term 'oral-literate'

<sup>375</sup> See Table 1: Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta, c. 1803-1905, 348-358.

Rammohun's popularity in the popular press prompted elite presses such as the Baptist Missionary Press to publish 500 copies of his English language tract on Hindu scripture, *An apology for the pursuit of final beatitude independently of Brahmunicipal observances*. Ram Comul Sen, the native official in charge of the Hindustani Press, published 500 copies each of *Translation of the Abridgement of the Vedantā* and English *Translation of the Īśā Upaniṣad*.<sup>376</sup> We note that these publications were not made by allies, followers or friends. The Baptists<sup>377</sup> and Ram Comul Sen were deeply critical of Rammohun's ideas of religion. Their publication therefore indicates that Rammohun's works had a market for readers which printing presses wanted to tap into.

The publications of the Baptist Mission Press and the Hindustani press also shows that the elite presses did not ignore Rammohun's works. In this context, we note that that educational associations like the CSBS also commissioned him to write text books on Geography and Bengali Grammar. Given the CSBS's status as an elite organisation which supplied books to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Hindu College, and collaborated with the College of Fort William and the Baptist Mission Press, it would be interesting to see how far these projects came to fruition.

In the case of the Geography text book, Rammohun began work in 1817, but the book was never published (he did however produce a manuscript of it for the CSBS).<sup>378</sup> It is

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<sup>376</sup> See Table 3: 'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820, 366-373.

<sup>377</sup> The Baptists (William Carey, Joshua Marshman being prominent amongst them) were initially well-disposed towards Rammohun. But by 1820, the relationship had soured. This context will be explored in greater detail in chapter six.

<sup>378</sup> Rammohun Roy's Geography textbook was commissioned by the CSBS in 1817. Appeared as unpublished in the CSBS'S annual reports: *Second Report*, 1819, Appendix no 18, 97; *Fourth Report*, 1821, Appendix v, 36; *Fifth Report*, 1823, Appendix vii, 36.

in this context that I tentatively argue that Rammohun's idea of geography in the *Exposition*, his emphasis on latitudes and longitudes and physical features can be traced to this unfinished project. In the case of the book on Bengali grammar, Rammohun's work was published posthumously and prepared for the press by his son Radhaprasad Roy. Priced at 8 annas, the CSBS printed 1930 copies of the first edition. Five more editions followed, with the last appearing in 1856.<sup>379</sup>

The CSBS also sought Rammohun's help in 1820 with the English translation of a Sanskrit text on Astronomy after its translators had severe difficulties with 'technical terms' in Sanskrit. The translation had been initially commissioned in 1817 and tentatively titled *Ferguson's Astronomy*.<sup>380</sup> Rammohun agreed to help but *Ferguson's Astronomy* still faced many delays and was only published the year after his death. Since Rammohun's contribution was not acknowledged in the final work, it raises the question of whether he contributed at all.<sup>381</sup>

The CSBS projects give us an important insight into Rammohun's priorities as an intellectual. They show that his focus remained on free tracts published from popular presses than prestigious projects throughout his time in Calcutta (c.1815-30), the most productive period of his life. Thus, he cannot be seen as an elitist thinker. The publication data of his works in 1820 and after his death shows that Rammohun was a popular author with the Bengali public. The first major disagreement in current historiography about Rammohun's restricted and elite audience is hence qualified.

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<sup>379</sup>See Table 1: Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta, c. 1803-1905, 348-358.

<sup>380</sup> *The Second Report of the Calcutta School Book Society* (Calcutta, 1819).

<sup>381</sup> *Tenth Report of the CSBS*, Appendix, No. 2, Depository List, (Calcutta, 1834), 27-31.

We now turn our attention to the second disagreement in current scholarship concerning Rammohun's writings, namely that his writings on Hindu scripture were unrelated to the *Tuhfat*. I argue that this disagreement is a product of the current perspective of Rammohun's ideas on religion as an interpretation of Hindu scripture. This perspective has also led to a problem- the comparative ignorance of the *Tuhfat* simply because it did not refer to Hindu scripture. For example, Killingley argues that the *Tuhfat* was written in the 'Islamic tradition' but does not provide any further details. Instead, he refers to an 'Islamic tradition' only to highlight the argument that since Rammohun's subsequent works were on Hindu scripture, the *Tuhfat* can be seen as 'a project that was abandoned in later writings'.<sup>382</sup> Similarly, Robertson perceives the *Tuhfat* as concerned with a particular interpretation of Islamic theology but does not discuss the particulars of Islamic theology. Instead, he dismisses it as 'unremarkable, perhaps of interest only because of its amateurish eclecticism'.<sup>383</sup> Thus neither Killingley nor Robertson spell out the intellectual context of the *Tuhfat*.

Drawing on Killingley and Robertson's perspectives, Brian Hatcher further argues that Rammohun introduced an elite religion ('Bourgeoisie Hinduism'). Further, 'Bourgeoisie Hinduism' was institutionalised in the *Brahmo Samaj* (founded by Rammohun in 1828) and developed further by the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*.<sup>384</sup> In Hatcher's view, Rammohun's conception of religion was a private, contemplative and elitist interpretation of Hindu scripture. Hatcher's interpretation however is not consistent with the publication data

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<sup>382</sup> Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures 1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993), 45.

<sup>383</sup> Bruce Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi, 1995), 97-109.

<sup>384</sup> Brian Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism or the faith of Modern Vedantists: Rare discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (Oxford, 2008), New York, 19-32.

available on Rammohun's chief work for the *Brahmo Samaj*, a book of *Brahmo* songs. This work was not only published by the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* but also by private publishers. After its initial publication in 1828, the book was reprinted in 1844 for 6 paise and in 1835 for 4 annas.<sup>385</sup> In 1853, Rev. James Long, observed in his catalogue of Bengali works that it had become a 'much used' text in Bengali society.<sup>386</sup> Long did not make a similar observation for any other text (or tract) in his catalogue. Rammohun's book on Brahmo songs was also reprinted in 1889. The publication data shows that there was a wider demand for Rammohun's idea of religion.

In the context of our argument regarding scholarly interpretations of the *Tuhfat*, we note that Hatcher's view of 'Bourgeoisie Hinduism' also solidifies the approach towards the *Tuhfat* adopted by Killingley and Robertson by perceiving Rammohun as a primarily Hindu thinker and ignoring the *Tuhfat* altogether. Historians of religion thus perceive the *Tuhfat* as unrelated to the wider body of Rammohun's work.

The arguments of Hatcher, Killingley and Robertson has deeply influenced historians of ideas such as Christopher Bayly and Sumit Sarkar who assume that Rammohun's ideas of Hinduism amounted to a private, contemplative and elitist interpretation of scripture and had no public political consequences and that Rammohun's ideas of Hindu scripture were a separate project from the *Tuhfat*.

Historians of ideas however do not ignore the importance of the intellectual context of the *Tuhfat*. In 1975, Sumit Sarkar opined that a lack of research on late-eighteenth and

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<sup>385</sup> See Table 1: Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta, c. 1803-1905, 348-358.

<sup>386</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*; Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, 2012); Sumit Sarkar, 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past' in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (Delhi, 1975), 46-68.



early-modern intellectual history of Bengal had resulted in an ignorance of the intellectual influences of the *Tuhfat*.<sup>387</sup> In this context, Sarkar made a case for more research on early modern intellectual history arguing that, ‘the uniqueness’ of the *Tuhfat*, ‘cannot be taken as finally settled till much more is known than at present about the intellectual history of eighteenth century India and particularly about its Islamic components’.<sup>388</sup> Without this vital historical context, he opined that one could not be completely certain whether Rammohun did or did *not* abandon the arguments of the *Tuhfat* in later writings.

Sarkar’s point about the lack of scholarly emphasis on the intellectual history of late-eighteenth century has also another implication, seen in the work of Barun De (who published his ideas on Rammohun in the same volume as Sarkar). De opined that, ‘Rammohun’s political and economic ideas merit veneration only by those who worship the history of India’s liberalism’.<sup>389</sup> In other words, an ignorance of late-eighteenth century Indian intellectual history led historians to the conclusion that the only context to Rammohun’s political thought was Liberalism.

De’s was not an isolated perspective. We find that Andrew Sartori also makes the same argument by confidently asserting that ‘Rammohun’s religious, social and political activities in the early-nineteenth century were a form of classical liberalism’.<sup>390</sup> Sartori further argues that the *Tuhfat* was a product of a classical liberal epistemology.<sup>391</sup> In

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<sup>387</sup> Sarkar, ‘Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past’, 49.

<sup>388</sup> Sarkar, ‘Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past’, 52.

<sup>389</sup> Barun De, ‘A Biographical Perspective on the Political and Economic Ideas of Rammohun Roy’ in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (Delhi, 1975), 147.

<sup>390</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2008), 61.

<sup>391</sup> Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 61.

this context, he stresses that the *Tuhfat*'s criticism of religious leaders was the clever use of 'a classical liberal trope- priestly cunning' and its references to the importance of property (which we will look into more detail in the next chapter) echoed the classical Liberal view of the importance of private property in society.<sup>392</sup> The *Tuhfat*, in Sartori's interpretation, is a Liberal text written in Persian, for a native elite. The problem with this argument is that it avoids a discussion of an important context: mainly that Rammohun's intellectual exposure to Liberal ideas occurred in Calcutta- 11 years *after* the *Tuhfat* was written. One way of seeing Sartori's interpretation is as evidence of a lack of research on the intellectual context of the *Tuhfat*.

In recent years however, historians of ideas have attempted to place the *Tuhfat* in its intellectual context. In 2015, Kashshaf Ghani argued that that the *Tuhfat*'s use of terms such as *Hārām* (illegal) and *Hālāl* (legal) and references to the *Qur'an* shows that it was the product of a late-eighteenth century *madrasa* education. Ghani argues that that contemporary *madrasas* in Bengal and North India would have emphasised a training in Sunni Islamic traditions of jurisprudence (*kalām*) and theology (*fiqh*).<sup>393</sup> He notes however that Rammohun's ideas were not only influenced by Sunni traditions of scriptural interpretation but also by radical thinkers who rejected them. In this context, Ghani argues that the specific arguments of the *Tuhfat* can be traced to radical Islamic thinkers who disagreed with contemporary theology such as the philosopher and poet Abū al- 'Ala al- Ma' arri (d.1057)

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<sup>392</sup> Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 62-3.

<sup>393</sup> Kashshaf Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition: *Tuhfat al-Muwahḥhidīn* in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Studia Iranica*, 44 (2015), 60.

Ghani argues that Rammohun was influenced by Ma'arri's critique of religion. Ma'arri conceptualised religion as 'a product of the human mind which men believe through forces of habit and education, never stopping to consider it to be true'.<sup>394</sup> He argued that the belief in God was intuitive and advocated the rejection of all religious practices.

According to Ghani, Ma'arri's emphasis on the difference between the intuitive understanding of God and rejection of the practices advocated by religious leaders is *the* context of the *Tuhfat* (particularly arguments on intuitive belief in God or 'nature', learned social practices or 'habits' and rejection of the teachings of religious leaders).<sup>395</sup> Ghani's research on the influence of Ma'arri has given us a glimpse of the Perso-Arabic intellectual context of the *Tuhfat*.

However, Ghani does not develop his ideas on Ma'arri any further. This may be due to an unresolved tension in his work; mainly that he is unable to reconcile concepts of *kalām* and *fiqh* with Ma'arri's radical rejection of theology and the legality of religion. This tension in Ghani's work can be seen in his discussion of apparent mistakes and linguistic problems in the *Tuhfat*. We briefly touch upon these below, since they directly pertain to the argument of this chapter.

Ghani main point of disagreement with the *Tuhfat* is with the interpretation of *Mujtahid* and *Muqallid*.<sup>396</sup> He observes that Rammohun's interpretation of these terms (as religious leader and follower respectively) deviated from the contemporary Sunni legal and theological tradition (which argued that there are no *Mujtahids* but rather

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<sup>394</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 72.

<sup>395</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 73.

<sup>396</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 65.

everyone is a *Muqallid*).<sup>397</sup> Ghani opines that presence of such fundamental errors would have only confused the reader.<sup>398</sup>

Interestingly, Ghani's interpretation of *Mujtahid* and *Muqallid* does not refer to Ma'arri's ideas at all. While earlier, Ghani had earlier interpreted Ma'arri's idea of religion as a critique of the unequal relations of power between a religious leader and a follower, he now ignores the radical thinker and instead argues that Rammohun's misinterpretation of these terms may have been due to a poor command of Persian.<sup>399</sup> He asserts that Rammohun used a plethora of Arabic words in the *Tuhfat* to make up for his lack of knowledge in Persian and concludes that this was also the reason why none of Rammohun's subsequent tracts and essays were in Persian. In his final assessment, Ghani opines that the *Tuhfat* is primarily a response to 'modernity' brought about by colonial rule and an indigenous form of 'Liberalism' (defined as 'a deep rooted liberal, humanitarian and rational current in Indian society') in the early-nineteenth century.<sup>400</sup>

We note that Ghani's attempt to place the *Tuhfat* in its intellectual context throws up four main problems:

First, the question of contextualising the works of radical Islamic thinkers in Rammohun's thought. When and where did Rammohun come across radical thought? And how do we account for ideas such as by Ma'arri?

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<sup>397</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 65.

<sup>398</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 65.

<sup>399</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 61.

<sup>400</sup> Ghani, 'Vestige of a Dying Tradition', 78.

Second, Ghani shows that an uncertainty over the syllabi of *madrasa* education in the eighteenth century can derail the entire project of placing the *Tuhfat* in its intellectual context. Ghani interpretation of *madrasa* education brought about unresolved tensions in his interpretation of the *Tuhfat*. This problem is compounded by the fact that in the *Exposition*, Rammohun referred to his education the *madrasa* as an important intellectual context to his thought.<sup>401</sup> Ignoring the intellectual context of a *madrasa* education is therefore problematic.

Third, the question of Rammohun's use of a plethora of Arabic terms in the Persian section of the *Tuhfat*. Why did he use so much Arabic? Was it because his command over Persian was weak, or was Rammohun referring to a Persian intellectual text/tradition in which Arabic plays an important role?

Finally, the question of the *Tuhfat* as an indigenous Liberal text. I argue that Ghani's perspective ignores the other problems mentioned above and affectively amounts to an admission of the severe lack of evidence for placing the *Tuhfat* in its own context.

The question that arises here is whether there is any scholarly perspective to the problems raised in our discussion. In this context we note that Christopher Bayly also attempted to place the *Tuhfat* in its intellectual context in *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Like Ghani, Bayly also interpreted the *Tuhfat* as an example of an indigenous form of Liberalism.<sup>402</sup>

Bayly's argument however differed from Ghani's in one crucial aspect. While Ghani compared the *Tuhfat* to Sunni scriptural tradition, Bayly argued that the tract was an

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<sup>401</sup> *Exposition*, 112.

<sup>402</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 35-7.

example of the philosophy of *akhlāq*. According to Bayly, *akhlāq* is ‘a kind of Indo-Islamic civic republicanism’.<sup>403</sup> Thus Bayly’s assessment did not place the tradition of *akhlāq* in its own context but only favourably compared it to civic republicanism.

In this context we note that the tradition of *akhlāq* has been placed in its own context by Muzaffar Alam. Alam argues that *akhlāq* is a philosophy which is primarily concerned with ethics (defined separately for the individual, household and government) and governance (the primary task of governments was investing in the welfare of their subjects and ensuring social stability).<sup>404</sup> Alam’s argument regarding *akhlāq* helps explain Bayly’s interpretation of the tradition as a civic philosophy. But it also shows that Bayly did not consider the key intellectual contribution of the tradition: a persuasive argument for the role of ethics and government. Alam notes that although *akhlāq* philosophy is a broad tradition, the principal text of the genre is *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*.

The *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was written by Nasir ad-Din Tusi (1201-1274) in 1235 in Quhistan, the kingdom of Alamut. It is primarily concerned with ethics. In this context, G.M. Wickens, the translator of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* assessed it as ‘the best known ethical digest to be composed in medieval Persia if not in all of medieval Islam’.<sup>405</sup> In keeping with the *akhlāq* tradition, Tusi also defined ethics separately for the individual, the household and the government.

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<sup>403</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 35-7.

<sup>404</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (London, 2004), 57-8.

<sup>405</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 9.

What made the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* unique was its conception of society. Alam argues that its concept of a society can be best described as ‘medieval multi-culturism’.<sup>406</sup> By this he meant that, ‘the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is the best example of the appropriation of non-Islamic and in strictly juristic terms even anti-Islamic ideas’.<sup>407</sup>

Alam argues that the importance of appropriation of non-Islamic ideas and the concept of medieval multi-culturism in the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is a product of the intellectual traditions from which it borrowed and developed.<sup>408</sup> Nasir ad-Din Tusi was influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, (particularly Aristotle’s conception of government) and by Islamic thinkers (such as Kindi, Abu Nasr Farabi, Avicenna, Avempace and Averroes).<sup>409</sup> In the *akhlāq* genre, his immediate intellectual predecessor was Ibn Miskawaih (d.1030).<sup>410</sup> Miskawaih’s ideas of human nature in *Tahdīb al-Akhlāq* would be an important influence in the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. However, as G.M. Wickens showed, Tusi did not only incorporate Miskawaih but also produced an argument which was ‘wider in scope, more rounded, more coherent in arrangement and his treatment of individual topics more developed and more engaging’.<sup>411</sup>

Our discussion now turns to a brief examination of the contents of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*.

We note that Tusi divided the text into three distinct ‘discourses’ or sections. Wickens

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<sup>406</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 74.

<sup>407</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 11.

See Also: Wickens, ‘Introduction’, *Nasirean Ethics*, 9: Tusi took the idea of appropriation seriously. In the wake of the Mongol invasion of Central Asia, twenty years after the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was written, Tusi worked with the Mongol prince Hulagu to dismantle administrative system of the Caliphate in Baghdad and form a new administrative system in which a non-Muslim ruler governed a predominantly Muslim populace. Tusi’s decision to work with Hulagu was momentous. It came at a time which Wickens refers to as ‘the greatest psychological watershed in Islamic civilisation’.

<sup>408</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 47.

<sup>409</sup> Wickens, ‘Introduction’, *Nasirean Ethics*, 10.

<sup>410</sup> Wickens, ‘Introduction’, *Nasirean Ethics*, 9.

<sup>411</sup> Wickens, ‘Introduction’, *Nasirean Ethics*, 10.

argued in this context that the first discourse, ‘the corrections of dispositions’ (*tahdhīb-i aḵhlāq*) was the most important section of the *Aḵhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, ‘in terms of space and priority’.<sup>412</sup> The first discourse was concerned with the individual and God. It referred to the relationship between the individual and God as one in which the former was accountable to the latter through his *conduct*.<sup>413</sup> Thus Tusi’s conception of individual ethics referred to *everyday ethical practices*. The discourse stressed that ethical actions would lead to greater happiness.<sup>414</sup>

According to Tusi an ethical individual was ‘a rational being’ (*‘āqil*).<sup>415</sup> A rational being did not refer to an individual who possessed any specific education. Rather, *‘āqil* referred to two characteristics: belief in the soul (*jauhar-i basīt*) and in God.<sup>416</sup> ‘The essence of man’, Tusi argued, ‘is to be the sustainer and recipient’ of the soul and God.<sup>417</sup> The connection between the soul and God was intricate, unchanging and absolute. The soul also recognised and directed the parts of the human body to the extent that ‘the body is a tool and an instrument for the soul’.<sup>418</sup>

Tusi argued that while all living creatures (vegetables, animals and plants) had souls, the human soul was unique.<sup>419</sup> This is because the human soul possessed ‘the faculty of rationality’ or the power of speech (*qūwat-i nuṭq*) which resulted in a unique ‘speculative intelligence’ (*‘aql-i naẓari*) and the ability ‘to distinguish between good and

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<sup>412</sup> Wickens, ‘Introduction’, *Nasirean Ethics*, 10.

<sup>413</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>414</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 37.

<sup>415</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>416</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>417</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 37.

<sup>418</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 37.

<sup>419</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 42.



bad'.<sup>420</sup> This faculty made the human being, 'the noblest in the world'. The human soul also had a form of 'practical intelligence' ('*aql-i 'amali*') for the 'ordering of life's affairs' and in contemplating the attributes of God.<sup>421</sup>

Tusi's conception of 'rationality' hence extended to all human beings, and not just a particular type of person. Neither did it apply to any particular religion. His argument for ethics depended on belief in God, and the soul. It is precisely because of the soul that the 'ability to distinguish between good and bad' is a characteristic of man.

The second discourse, 'the regulation of the household' (*tadbīr-i manāzil*) explained the relationship between an individual and family in a household.<sup>422</sup> According to Wickens, the household was the basic 'economic' unit and the main basis of the lived experience of the individual.<sup>423</sup> This is because the household was the location of an individual's wealth, property and family.<sup>424</sup> Tusi advocated generosity in donating wealth and prudence in looking after one's property and temperance when dealing with other members of the household.<sup>425</sup> In this sense, the household was regulated and in effect, *governed*.

The third discourse, 'the government of cities' (*siyāsāt-i mudun*) was about the relationship between an individual and the political unit of the city, state or empire.<sup>426</sup> Tusi argued that the individual was a member of a wider society and governed by

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<sup>420</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 42.

<sup>421</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 42.

<sup>422</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 153-5.

<sup>423</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 155.

<sup>424</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 156.

<sup>425</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 159.

<sup>426</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 185.

monarchical authority.<sup>427</sup> He stressed that it was not possible for an individual to *not* live in a society.<sup>428</sup> Society, he theorised, was the fabric of everyday life:

When men render aid to each other, each one performing important tasks and observing the law (*qānuṇ*) of justice (*ʿadālat*) in transactions (*muʿāmala*) by giving greatly and receiving in exchange of the labour of others, then the means of livelihood are realised and the succession of the individual and the survival of the species is assured and arranged: as is the case in fact. The same idea is to be found expressed by the Philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ*) in the following way: a thousand hard-working individuals are required before one morsel can be put into the mouth.

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We note from the above passage that Tusi's ideas of society was also an idealisation of the concept of society. This idealisation was his deceleration of how society *ought* to be. Further he argued that ideally, if there was 'love' between the various members of society, political authority ought not to have been required to prevent social conflict.<sup>430</sup> In practical terms however, this was not the case and intervention by monarchical authority was absolutely critical to prevent social conflict and ensure justice.<sup>431</sup>

Tusi perceived justice as a 'half way point' to be enforced by monarchical authorities. He argued in this context that the main task of monarchical authority was to intervene in society through laws, rules and regulations.<sup>432</sup> Thus Tusi advocated political authority

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<sup>427</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, Wickens noted in this context that although Tusi was influenced by Aristotle's ideas of government, he did not refer to the Greek model of a city-state but rather conceptualised political authority as monarchical.

<sup>428</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 195.

<sup>429</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 189.

<sup>430</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 196.

<sup>431</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 191.

<sup>432</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 191.

in the context of a society which could not always be ethical. This can be seen from his discussion on the necessity of government (*siyāsat*):

Man [...] is naturally in need of the combination called 'civilised life' (*tamaddun*). Now, the motives (*dawā'ī*) for men's actions differ and their movements are directed towards varying ends e.g. the intention of one will be to attain a pleasure whereas that of another will be to acquire an honour: thus if they be left to their own natures (*ṭabā'ī*), no co-operation can conceivably result among them, for the 'domineering man' (*mutaghallib*) will make everyone his slave while the greedy (*ḥarīs*) will desire for himself all things that are acquired; and when strife befalls among them, they will concern themselves only with mutual destruction and injury. Necessarily therefore one requires some type of management to render each one content with the station that he deserves and bring him his due, to restrain man's hand from depredation (*ta'addī*) and from the infringement of the rights of others and to concern itself with the task for which it is responsible among the matters pertaining to co-operation. Such a management (*tadbīr*) is called government (*siyāsat*).<sup>433</sup>

We note that Tusi's idea of governance refers to the prevention of social conflict caused by unethical individuals.<sup>434</sup> The government would have to be capable of intervening in the everyday lives of its inhabitants.<sup>435</sup> It followed that for any government to be an effective political organisation, its power would have to be localised. This implied that the government was responsible for the welfare of its subjects. A government's primary role, in this context would be to create the conditions by which ethical practice became possible.

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<sup>433</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 190.

<sup>434</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 191.

<sup>435</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 233. 'The King should not keep petitioners at a distance, nor should he listen to the denunciations of others without evidence.'

In conclusion, we see that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was an argument for individual and societal ethics. The concept of God and soul was absolutely central to Tusi's ideas of ethical practice. An ethical individual was one who recognised the presence of both. Tusi argued that although ideally, all individuals *ought* to be ethical, in practice, this never occurred. In this case, he advocated the intervention of a localised government to prevent social conflict and promote justice.

The question that now arises, is how did the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, a text written in Quhistan influence Indian intellectual traditions? In this context, Alam has shown the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was an important text for the Mughals. The first Mughal Emperor, Babur (r.1526-30) introduced the text to the Mughal court.<sup>436</sup> The third Emperor, Akbar (r.1556-1605) institutionalised the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* as the political philosophy of the Empire.<sup>437</sup>

Alam noted that Akbar was not only personally influenced by the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* but also insisted that Mughal officials read the text. The importance given to the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was representative of a larger socio-cultural development in the Mughal Empire- the pursuit of the Persian language and its intellectual traditions-poetry, philosophy and ethics.<sup>438</sup> According to Alam, Akbar systematically 'Persianised' the Empire; from exclusively Persian language poet laureates (*malik-ush-shu'arā'*) to translations of literary works into Persian, to a Persian speaking royal household and administration.<sup>439</sup> Since all revenue records were maintained in Persian, it meant that

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<sup>436</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 50.

<sup>437</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 61.

<sup>438</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 130.

<sup>439</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 130.

the *entire* administrative service from large Mughal cities to village officials would have familiar with Persian.

Akbar's policy towards Persian did not only affect the Mughal court and bureaucracy but also had consequences for *madrasa* syllabi. This is because Akbar introduced changes in *madrasas* to educate aspirants for a future employment in government service and introduced reforms in the *madrasas* to form a curriculum which emphasised 'non-religious themes'.<sup>440</sup>

According to Alam, the *madrasa* curriculum under Akbar consisted of 'arithmetic (*hisāb*), geometry, astronomy, measurement (*masāhat*), mathematics (*riyāzī*)', and significantly, subjects which were addressed in the second and third discourse of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, 'household economy (*tadbīr-i manzil*) and rules of government (*siyāsāt-i mudun*)'.<sup>441</sup> In this context, we note that *akhlāq* was also taught in the *madrasas* and amongst the *akhlāq* texts, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was taught in all *madrasas* within Mughal dominions (including Bengal).

Kumkum Chatterjee has shown that in Bengal, Akbar's educational reforms made a *madrasa* education more 'culturally acceptable' to Hindus (particularly Kayasthas and Khatris).<sup>442</sup> Even *madrasa* faculty, though initially Iranians later featured Hindu teachers.<sup>443</sup> On the whole, Akbar's reign witnessed the beginning of a phase when

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<sup>440</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 129.

<sup>441</sup> Muzaffar Alam, 'The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics', *Modern Asian Studies*, 32 (1998), 326.

<sup>442</sup> Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 220.

<sup>443</sup> Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 220.

large numbers of Hindus began to join *madrasas* to become officials of the middle and lower bureaucracy.<sup>444</sup>

Akbar's reforms of the *madrasas* changed the way that Mughal bureaucracy was recruited and the process continued even after his death. This can be seen in the writings of the Mughal bureaucrat Chandar Bhan 'Brahmin' (d.1666-70).<sup>445</sup> Chandar Bhan was from a Brahmin family and represented a general trend in upper caste Hindu families to aspire for imperial service.<sup>446</sup>

Chandar Bhan was born during Akbar's reign (the exact year of his birth is not known) and his career spanned the reigns of Jahangir (r.1605-1627), Shah Jahan (r.1638-58) and the early years of Aurungzeb(r. 1658-1707) after which he retired from the bureaucracy.<sup>447</sup> According to Rajeev Kinra, Chandar Bhan was one of the most well-known bureaucrats of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with 'privileged access to the royal household, courtly society and the administrative apparatus.'<sup>448</sup> Chandar Bhan was also 'one of the greatest Persian prose stylists and poets of his era' and author of the widely circulated *Chahār Chaman*.<sup>449</sup> His official correspondence 'is full of poetry' and Kinra opines that 'it is quite difficult at times to distinguish his administrative self from his poetic self'.<sup>450</sup>

Chandar Bhan is not an exception, but rather a representative of the Persianate culture of Mughal bureaucracy. As Kinra noted, 'for the Mughal state, the language of poetry

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<sup>444</sup> Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 220.

<sup>445</sup> Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (California, 2015), 2.

<sup>446</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 4.

<sup>447</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 2.

<sup>448</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 5.

<sup>449</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 6.

<sup>450</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 10.

was the language of politics'.<sup>451</sup> In this context, Muzaffar Alam has given us a detailed translation of the Chandar Bhan's letter of advice to his son Tej Bhan for a career in imperial service. Chandar Bhan recommended the following to his son:

*Gulistān* and *Bustān* by Shaikh Muslihud-Din Sa'di Shirazi in the form of verses in Persian on the importance of cultivating ethical practices such as generosity, humility. Initially, it is necessary for one to acquire training in *akhlāq*. It is appropriate to listen always to the advice of elders and act accordingly. By studying the ***Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī***, *Akhlāq-i Jalāli*, *Gulistān* and *Bustān* one could accumulate one's own capital and gain the virtue of knowledge. When you practice what you have learnt, your code of conduct too will become firm. [...] One should read books on norms, ethics and history books [since they are] absolutely necessary. Of [...] poets here are some whose collections I have read in my youth and the names of which I am writing down. When you have some leisure, read them, and they will give you both pleasure and relief and improve your language.<sup>452</sup> (Emphasis mine).

Chandar Bhan then proceeded to list the names of 44 Persian poets (including Hafiz whom Rammohun quoted in the *Tuḥfat*)

From the above we see that Akbar's policy towards Persian, governance and the *madrasas* was continued by his successors; Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. We also see the vital importance of poetry to bureaucrats. Until 1707 at least, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was taught in conjunction with texts on poetry, ethics and literature.

Our discussion shows that the *akhlāq tradition* was not seen by the Hindu Mughal bureaucrats as a purely instrumental doctrine for an eventual job, but rather as an

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<sup>451</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 11.

<sup>452</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 130.

ethical tradition and a part of a literary and cultural context which produced poetry in Persian.

Unfortunately, the importance of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* after the reign of Aurungzeb has not yet been traced in current historical scholarship. From the perspective of current scholarship, our evidence of the importance of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* comes to a halt after 1707.

In the next section I will show however that references to *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* can be found in the late-eighteenth century with the advent of the East India Company in Bengal and that a close examination of those references throw light on the continuing importance of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and the Persian ethical poetry in the *madrassa* education.



## Section one: *Akhlāq* texts in early colonial Bengal

The East India Company's intervention in Bengal in the late-eighteenth century prompted an intense engagement with Persian literature, grammar and poetry.

Influential officials such as the Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings (1772-85) and the Governor of Bengal, Henry Vansittart (1759-64) considered Persian learning to be an absolute necessity for future Company-men.<sup>453</sup> This is understandable since Persian was the language of administration in Bengal at the time (and continued to be so until 1835). However, much like the Mughal bureaucrats of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Company officials were not only interested in Persian from an institutional point of view, but they also considered the language to be have an aesthetic and poetic value.<sup>454</sup>

According to Beatrice Teissier, the Company's interest in Persian received an 'impetus' in the 1780's with the arrival of William Jones to Calcutta. Jones was appointed as a judge at the Calcutta Supreme Court in 1783.<sup>455</sup> He 'championed' the publication of Persian and Arabic literature and was especially interested in Persian poetry (Hafiz and Sa'adi amongst others), traditional Persian histories and Mughal works (such as the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*).<sup>456</sup> In 1771, his book on Persian grammar referred to the language as 'a branch of literature' which was 'rich, melodious and elegant'.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Beatrice Teissier, 'Texts from the Persian in the late eighteenth-century India and Britain, Culture or Construct?' *Iran*, 47 (2009), 133.

<sup>454</sup> Teissier, 'Texts from the Persian', 134.

<sup>455</sup> Teissier, 'Texts from the Persian', 135.

<sup>456</sup> Teissier, 'Texts from the Persian', 135.

<sup>457</sup> Teissier, 'Texts from the Persian', 136.

Institutionally, the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1784 aided the publication and English translations of Persian manuscripts by scholar-officials such as James Anderson, John Stonehouse, William Chambers, Thomas Law, William Kirkpatrick, Alexander Hamilton and Francis Gladwin who were influenced by Jones' interpretation of the Persian language.<sup>458</sup> Tessier notes that their interest in Persian extended to an interest in a diversity of concerns relating to Mughal India- 'government, monarchy, empire, poetry and literature'. She shows that 'with the sole exception of Hamilton' all the other scholar-officials 'enjoyed' cultivating Persian poetry.<sup>459</sup> Their works attempted to historically contextualise Persian manuscripts and 'demonstrated a deep respect for Persian culture'.<sup>460</sup>

Some of their publications also perceived Persian literature in terms of 'late-eighteenth century British preoccupations' in Bengal.<sup>461</sup> A major 'preoccupation' for instance was the teaching of the Persian language to Company officials. In this context, scholar-officials drew from their own formidable background and interest in Persian literature and poetry to produce textbooks of translations and elementary grammar for future Company recruits.<sup>462</sup>

In 1795, one such textbook, *The Persian Monshee* was written by the scholar-officials Francis Gladwin and William Chambers as an introduction to Arabic and Persian.<sup>463</sup> It

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<sup>458</sup> Tessier, 'Texts from the Persian', 135.

<sup>459</sup> Tessier, 'Texts from the Persian', 144.

<sup>460</sup> Tessier, 'Texts from the Persian', 144.

<sup>461</sup> Tessier, 'Texts from the Persian', 144.

<sup>462</sup> Tessier, 'Texts from the Persian', 144.

<sup>463</sup> Francis Gladwin, *The Persian Monshee* (Calcutta, 1795), 1; P. J. Marshall, 'Gladwin, Francis (1744/5–1812)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10788>, accessed 12 Sept 2016.

Francis Gladwin published widely in Persian. Amongst numerous other works of poetry and grammar, he also published an English translation of *Pandnamā* in 1788 and of *Ā'in-i Akbarī* in 1783-6. Gladwin's translation remained the Standard English translation of the *Ā'in* for a century. Gladwin was 'close' to

contained translation exercises of short stories and familiar passages from the Sermon on the Mount, but also included material from Persian texts which Gladwin was familiar with (such as the *Pandnamā*). *The Persian Monshee* was a well-received text. It went through three reprints in the early-nineteenth century in India. In 1801, it was published in London. This was followed by a reprint in 1822. In 1840 it was reprinted in Paris, and in India.<sup>464</sup>

The *Persian Monshee* included translations of Chandar Bhan 'Brahmin's, *Chahār Chaman* with specific importance given to a section called *Qawā'id al-Saṭṭanat* (Principles of governance). *Qawā'id al-Saṭṭanat* is a description of courtly festivities, rituals and the way in which justice is administered at Shah Jahan's court.<sup>465</sup>

In the context of our argument, *The Persian Monshee* has another significance. We note that parts of the text was written in collaboration with William Chamber's native Persian language teacher (*munshi*).<sup>466</sup> This point is important because *The Persian Monshee* was also a text which informed its readers (Company officials) on the desirable educational qualifications of *munshis*.<sup>467</sup> As we noted in the last chapter, Company officials required the help of *munshis* with interpretations of Persian.

In this context, I argue that Chamber's *munshi* almost certainly included texts which he thought were relevant and would have been familiar with from his own education in the *madrasa*. This could help explain the *Persian Monshee's* emphasis on Persian

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Warren Hastings and Robert Clive. In the late eighteenth century he worked in the revenue department of the Company. He died in 1812 in Patna.

<sup>464</sup> Gladwin, *Persian Monshee* (Paris, 1840), vii.

<sup>465</sup> Gladwin, *Persian Monshee* (Calcutta, ii, 1795), 43.

<sup>466</sup> Gladwin, *Persian Monshee*, ii, 2.

<sup>467</sup> Gladwin, *Persian Monshee*, iii, 1.

ethical poetry (*Pandnamā*) and writings of Chandar Bhan 'Brahmin' (*Qawā'id al-Saṭṭanat*). *The Persian Monshee* thus gives us a glimpse of late-eighteenth century *madrasa* syllabi in Bengal. It constitutes material evidence of the fact that the writings of Mughal bureaucrats and the intellectual context they would have been familiar with continued to be studied during this period.

In 1801, Gladwin was appointed as the first professor of Persian at Fort William College.<sup>468</sup> In 1803, the Department was joined by a new member, John Baillie, an army officer of the East India Company and orientalist scholar.<sup>469</sup> Baillie remained as faculty until 1807, and amongst the manuscripts collected by him was the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*.<sup>470</sup> This question is, however whether Company officials recognised the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* as an important text?

In this context, we note that CSBS reprinted selections from *The Persian Monshee* in 1825 and 1835.<sup>471</sup> Amongst their selections were also translations from the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*.<sup>472</sup> The presence of *akhlāq* texts also shows an official recognition of the tradition. The CSBS was also interested in Persian poetry. Its selection also included *Gulistān* and *Bustān* by Sa'adi Shirazi as well as *Pandnamā*. These were Persian verses on the importance of cultivating ethical practices such as generosity and humility.

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<sup>468</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 85.

<sup>469</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole, 'Baillie, John (1772–1833)', rev. James Falkner, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1064>, accessed 12 Sept 2016]

<sup>470</sup> William Irvine, 'The Baillie Collection of Arabic and Persian MSS.', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, July (1905), 560-5.

<sup>471</sup> *The Persian Reader or short extracts from various Persian writers* (Calcutta, i-iii, 1825) and *The Persian Reader or short extracts from various Persian writers* (Calcutta, i-iii, 1835).

<sup>472</sup> *The Persian Reader* (Calcutta, ii, 1825), 149-58.

The CSBS followed Gladwin's translation of the *Pandnamā* (first published in 1788 with a revised second edition in 1796. The CSBS printed the 1796 edition).<sup>473</sup> Significantly, Gladwin had translated the *Pandnamā* as 'A compendium of ethics'. This title was retained in the CSBS selection as well.

The CSBS's choice of selection of Persian texts not only informs us of the ways in which Perso-Arabic literature and philosophy was perceived at the time but also reveals that this literature that was *circulated at large*. I use the phrase 'circulated at large' to indicate that the CSBS operated on a much wider mandate than the College of Fort William. Its publications were not only meant for Company officials but also for schools; in Calcutta, in the districts of Bengal (Barrackpur, Burdwan, Chinsura, Dinajpur and Murshidabad) and even in territories as far away as Agra.<sup>474</sup> The Hindu College primarily depended on CSBS publications (although it wasn't able to pay for most of them) and the Church Missionary Society in Calcutta acknowledged their aid in free books.<sup>475</sup>

The CSBS reprints of *akhlāq* translations were a part of their *Persian Reader series* (in 3 parts) which contained English translations from other Persian texts (such as *Pandnamā*) and translated Persian short stories. That the series was quite popular can be seen from two references to sales/publication figures. The first, is from the *Ninth Report* of the CSBS in 1832 which noted that 231 copies had been sold that year; and

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<sup>473</sup> *A Compendium of ethics by Sheikh Sady*, trans. Francis Gladwin (Calcutta, 1788) and Second edition (Calcutta, 1796).

<sup>474</sup> *Third Report of the Calcutta School Book Society* (Calcutta, 1820), 26-7. [CSBS]

<sup>475</sup> *Third Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1820), 26-7.

the second, is from the *Tenth Report* of 1834 which recorded the official approval for a print order of 2500 copies.<sup>476</sup>

The CSBS did not only publish *English* translations of Persian texts. From its very inception in 1818, Bengali native intellectuals associated with the organisation such as Radhakanta Deb, Ram Comul Sen and Taranicharan Mitra pushed for *Bengali* translations as well.<sup>477</sup> In 1817, they proposed a project for translating Persian ‘moral tales’ into Bengali. (Ram Comul Sen in particular may have been keen to publish Bengali translations since he had donated a copy of Gladwin’s *The Persian Monshee* to the CSBS library that year.)<sup>478</sup> The project was approved and 500 copies were printed in the first edition. Owing to their popularity, 1500 copies were printed for the second edition.<sup>479</sup> The print run for the second edition was exhausted very quickly. The CSBS then approved of a new edition with a print run of 4000 copies to be sent to ‘distant stations’ in Bengal.<sup>480</sup>

The circulation of publications to ‘distant stations’ was an important part of the CSBS operations in Bengal. The intended recipients of ‘distant stations’ were not Company officials but rather ‘native adults’.<sup>481</sup> In the *Third Report* (1820), the highest decision making body of the organisation (‘Committee’) published its plan to ‘facilitate the circulation of the society’s works in the *Muffasal* [districts] among native adults and generally render them more accessible’.<sup>482</sup> A radical plan was chalked out. While

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<sup>476</sup> *Ninth Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1832), appendix no. 2, 26; *Tenth Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1834), 47.

<sup>477</sup> *First Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1817), 4.

<sup>478</sup> *First Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1817), 4.

<sup>479</sup> *First Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1817), 4.

<sup>480</sup> *First Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1817), 4.

<sup>481</sup> *Third Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1820), 27.

<sup>482</sup> *Third Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1820), 27.

previously, the CSBS had worked with 'auxiliary associations' and schools in the districts to provide books at cost price, the plan now was a co-operation with 'any individual, or body of individuals engaged in superintending native schools in the interior of the country, provided the number and value of the books required should not be very trifling'.<sup>483</sup> The Committee took steps to popularise their plan by placing advertisements in the government gazettes and even requested Company officials in the districts to distribute the catalogues as widely as possible amongst the natives. The CSBS also planned to publish a catalogue of books in the Bengali language.

The CSBS catalogue of books in the Bengali language would have been bound to include *Persian moral tales*. This is because Radhakanta Deb, Ram Comul Sen and Taranicharan Mitra were also members of the 'Committee'.<sup>484</sup> We note in this context that apart from Ram Comul Sen; Radhakanta Deb was also a bitter critic of Rammohun, opposed his ideas of *Sati* reform and co-founded the *Dharma Sabha*. In this context, Deb's and Sen's interest in popularising Persian stories shows that the use of Persian and the discussion of texts written in the language was not only limited to Rammohun Roy and his associates, or even limited to select groups of intellectuals. Rather Persian was seen an intellectual context, a landscape of ideas on ethics, government and everyday life. And through the CSBS and its members, these native intellectuals planned to popularise the ideas of early modern Persian texts and reach a readership which may not have been familiar with these ideas previously.

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<sup>483</sup> *Third Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1820), 27.

<sup>484</sup> Kopf, *British Orientalism*, 108-9.

The question of how Persian was received through translated texts in Bengali as well as through the *Persian Reader Series* has unfortunately not been researched. So, we do not have any information currently on how far the plan to reach out to a broader readership worked. What is significant here, is that we have stories written in the Persian language being translated into Bengali and distributed. In the early-nineteenth century at least, the Persian cultural context was a recognised, observable feature to CSBS native subscribers, Company officials, Fort William College faculty and native employees of the Company.

In *Recovering Liberties*, Bayly did not consider this context; the role of the CSBS, the Persian Department at Fort William College or native intellectuals but contended that *akhlāq* was rejected by native intellectuals as an early modern political philosophy which was dismissed since it would not have much role to play in the cosmopolitan and global diaspora of Liberal ideas.<sup>485</sup> Our discussion however shows that this view can be qualified.

Our discussion has also showed that *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was also translated into English and that sections of the text were reprinted in textbooks for schools and colleges. At the centre of this process was the Fort William College Persian faculty. As the previous chapter noted, Rammohun was associated with Fort William College in 1801 and in 1805 was employed as the Persian *munshi* of one of its early graduates, John Digby. Whether from the *madrasa* or Fort William College, Rammohun would have been acquainted with the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*.

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<sup>485</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 35-7.



In the next section I will argue that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was an important influence on the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn*. The *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*'s stress on the importance of ethics and its discussion of the human soul are arguments which are referred in the *Tuḥfat* as well.

## **Section two: The similarities between the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and the *Tuḥfat*: An exploratory study**

The *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* (henceforth, *Tuḥfat*) is Rammohun's first known work and the only surviving example of his writings in Murshidabad. The *Tuḥfat* is also his only known Perso-Arabic tract and its choice of language(s) meant that it could only be read by an educated native elite.

The scope of the *Tuḥfat*'s argument was not however restricted to the elite. This can be seen in a brief discussion of its title. The title *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* literally translates to 'A gift to the believers of one God'. Throughout the tract, Rammohun stressed that the believers of one God did not refer to an exclusive community but rather that 'everyone' in society was a believer of one God.<sup>486</sup> In other words, he stressed the belief in *one* God was *intuitive*. Rammohun paraphrased the argument for the intuitive belief in one God by the use of the word 'nature'.<sup>487</sup>

Thus, the *Tuḥfat*'s choice of languages notwithstanding, Rammohun addressed the widest possible target audience that he could conceptualise.<sup>488</sup> His argument is similar to the first discourse of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* which stressed that the knowledge of the

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<sup>486</sup> *Tuḥfat*, 1.

<sup>487</sup> *Tuḥfat*, 1.

<sup>488</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, 55.

existence of God was intuitive and 'self-evident'.<sup>489</sup> Further, as Wickens noted, the argument of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* also addressed a wide target audience since it was not restricted to any particular community or religion but extended to all human beings.<sup>490</sup>

Rammohun now introduced a tension in the argument. He argued that 'everyone' while intuitively believing in one God, had also been brought up to believe in *many* gods.<sup>491</sup> He paraphrased the argument of belief in many gods by the use of the word, 'habit'.<sup>492</sup> Rammohun then made a distinction between 'nature' and 'habit' by stressing that while one's intuitive 'nature' stayed the same, 'habits' could be reformed, changed and even dismissed.<sup>493</sup> Rammohun conceptualised religious and social practices as 'habit'. He also argued that the 'organisation' of society a product of religious 'habits'.

[...] all races inhabiting different countries [who] have invented special words indicating certain ideas which form the basis of the invention of religion upon which the organisation of society depends [...]<sup>494</sup>

Rammohun argued that any 'habit' introduced by religious leaders (*Mujtahids*) was illegitimate. This is because the *Mujtahids* advocated 'habits' without providing any justification for doing so.<sup>495</sup> This paved the way for the introduction of ideas in which

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<sup>489</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 37.

<sup>490</sup> Wickens, 'Introduction', *Nasirean Ethics*, 11.

<sup>491</sup> *Tuhfat*, 8-9.

<sup>492</sup> *Tuhfat*, 1.

<sup>493</sup> *Tuhfat*, 1.

<sup>494</sup> *Tuhfat*, 7.

<sup>495</sup> *Tuhfat*, 12-3. Rammohun argued that his point of view could be logically proved while those of the religious leaders or *Mujtahid* could not be logically proved but were simply inherited social conventions. He rejected the *Mujtahids*' assertion that following inherited social conventions was an example of the established and accepted concept of *tawātur* and instead argued that the *Mujtahids* had deliberately misinterpreted the concept. According to Rammohun, *tawātur* did not imply that what was followed could not be logically proved. Further, he opined that even if the ideas of the *Mujtahids* could be

the distinction between 'possible and impossible' could not be made because they were not discussed thoroughly.<sup>496</sup> One implication of this was that the *Mujtahids* introduced 'habits' which were unethical practices. According to Rammohun, such practices also contributed to social conflict. The members of society who were unduly affected by the *Mujtahids* and their interpretations were their followers (*Muqallids*).

From Ghani's research we argue that Rammohun's argument regarding 'habit' and the criticism of religious leaders was influenced by Ma'arri's critique of religion. On the question of how Rammohun came across Ma'arri's ideas, our earlier discussion of *madrasa* syllabi in late-eighteenth century Bengal showed that it focussed on 'non-religious themes'. It is possible that Rammohun was acquainted the writings of the radical thinker and that his ideas did not contradict the prevailing intellectual context of the *madrasas*.

Rammohun was not against the concept of religious practices. Rather, his aim was only to identify those religious practices which were advocated by the *Mujtahids*. He argued in this context that:

Followers of certain religions believe that the Creator has created mankind for discharging the duties connected with the welfare of the present and the future life by observing the tenets of that particular religion. The followers of other religions therefore are liable to punishments and torments in future because they differ from them in articles of faith. Consequently the seeds of dogma and prejudice are sown in their hearts. Instead of sincerity, followers of

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proved, it would still not be open to discussion and debate. Rather, all discussion would be 'closed'. This would contradict syllogistic logic where 'the questioning of the premise' was an important part of the 'discussion' (*māna*).

<sup>496</sup> *Tuhfat*, 12-3.

different religions condemn each other [...] This is in spite of all of them enjoying same pains and pleasures of spring, rain, health as well as inconveniences, pain and gloominess without any distinction of being a follower of a particular religion.<sup>497</sup>

By arguing that all members of society lived similar lives of 'pleasure and pain' irrespective of the diverse religious tenets they that chose to follow, Rammohun contrasted social conflict with the everyday. He noted that the same social practices which contributed to '*welfare*' caused conflict when controlled and interpreted by *Mujtahids* as religious practices. In this case, he appealed to the *Muqallids* that:

Mankind is able to distinguish between the truth and untruth and the true propositions from the false ones by freeing themselves of the useless restraints of religion which sometimes become sources of prejudice against one another and the causes of physical and mental troubles.<sup>498</sup>

The above passage clearly implies that conflictual religious practices required to be identified as illegitimate in order to prevent social conflict. In this context Rammohun argued that illegitimate religious practices could be identified by every 'individual' by their 'intellectual faculties and senses'. He argued that:

God has endowed each individual with intellectual facilities and senses. This should be used to discern the good from the bad, and man does not need to follow his fellows without reason if he has been invested with the power of intellectual thought.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> *Tuhfat*, 8.

<sup>498</sup> *Tuhfat*, 7.

<sup>499</sup> *Tuhfat*, 20.

We note that this argument is rather vague. For instance, ‘intellectual faculties’ and the ‘power of intellectual thought’ is not explained in the passage. It clearly did not refer to a specific form of intellectual training, for ‘God had (already) endowed each individual’ with it. On the other hand, it is too simplistic to see the above passage as a mere appeal to common sense.

In this context, I argue that the argument of the above passage can also be interpreted with reference to *Akh̄lāq-i Nāṣirī*’s argument of the connection between God, the human soul and ethical practice.<sup>500</sup> According to Tusi, the soul was instituted by God and the soul was also responsible for ethical practice. He argued that a ‘rational individual’ (*‘āqil*) was one who was aware of the relationship between God, the soul and everyday ethical practice.<sup>501</sup> Tusi also stressed that *‘āqil* did not refer to a particular form of education.<sup>502</sup>

I tentatively suggest that Rammohun’s argument was that God endowed ‘intellectual facilities’ *to the soul*, which in turn affected everyday conduct. Since Tusi defined ethics as everyday ethical practice, Rammohun’s argument about God and intellectual thought was an argument for ethical practice. His reference to ‘the power of intellectual thought’ for example could be a reference to *‘āqil*. With *‘āqil*, ‘a man could discern the good from the bad’ without ‘the need to follow his fellows’ or the *Mujtahids*.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>501</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>502</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 37.

<sup>503</sup> *Tuhfat*, 20.

In this way, the *Tuhfat* proposed the emancipation of the *Muqallids* from the *Mujtahids* through an appeal to the concept of '*āqil*'. The argument for ethical practice in this case was Rammohun's *Tuhfat* or 'gift' to the *Muqallids*.<sup>504</sup> Our discussion of the *Tuhfat* strongly indicates that Rammohun may have been influenced by the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* while expressing key arguments concerning God, the soul and '*āqil*'.

We now turn to another distinct argument in the *Tuhfat*- Rammohun's ideas concerning the use of the Persian language. I argue that a discussion of this point reveals an important aspect of his political thought; mainly the concern with accessibility.

The *Tuhfat* is divided into two parts- the Introduction (in Arabic) and the main text (in Persian). In the Introduction Rammohun argued that the use of Persian was necessary in the main text 'to make it more intelligible to readers who don't understand Arabic' ('*ajam*').<sup>505</sup> This point is revealing since it shows that Arabic (and *not* Persian) was his language of choice.

In this context we note that in current historiography, Rammohun's choice of language in the *Tuhfat* has attracted sharp criticism. As noted earlier, Ghani argued the main text of the *Tuhfat* though claimed to be written in Persian actually contained a plethora of Arabic words. According to Ghani this was because Rammohun's command over the Persian language was poor. Ghani's assessment is not an exception. Historians

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<sup>504</sup> *Tuhfat*, 8. In this context, we note a further point of similarity between the Tusi and Rammohun's ideas. As we noted in an earlier section, Tusi argued that while all living creatures (vegetables, animals and plants) had souls, the human soul was unique. This is because the human soul possessed 'the faculty of rationality'. This point was also made by Rammohun in the *Tuhfat*.

<sup>505</sup> *Tuhfat*, 1.

such as B.N. Dasgupta considered Rammohun's use of Persian, juvenile; and the *Tuhfat*'s first translator, Obaidullah el Obaide commented on its 'abstruse' style.<sup>506</sup>

In this context we note that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, though a Persian text, employed Arabic vocabulary heavily. Wickens showed that the use of Arabic was not an authorial eccentricity but related to the type of arguments employed- Tusi employed a syllogistic mode of argument for which Arabic was more suited.<sup>507</sup> Thus the heavy use of Arabic indicated authorial preference for the use of a certain typology of argument. According to Wickens, the use of syllogisms in *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* also made for complicated reading.<sup>508</sup> In this context, historians have oft noted that the *Tuhfat* has a syllogistic structure. From our reference to *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* we see that Rammohun preferred to use Arabic because it was more suitable for syllogisms.

In this context, I argue that Rammohun's references to Persian show a concern with accessibility. Rammohun articulated his argument by referring to the fourteenth century Persian poet Hafiz. His choice of Hafiz was not unusual. According to Ghulam Abbas Dayal, Hafiz was one of the most well-known poets of Saffavid Persia and Mughal India.<sup>509</sup> Hafiz, as we noted earlier, was also one of Chandra Bhan Brahmin's favourite poets. In the case of early-nineteenth century Bengal, Dayal notes that quotations from Hafiz can also be found in Debendranath Tagore's *Autobiography*.<sup>510</sup> This can be seen even in the mid nineteenth century. For example, P.C. Roy, the late-nineteenth century Bengali scientist referred to the impact of his Hafiz's poetry on his

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<sup>506</sup> *Tuhfat*, 'Translator's Preface', [page number not given].

<sup>507</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 15.

<sup>508</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 15.

<sup>509</sup> Ghulam Abbas Dalal, *Ethics in Persian Poetry: With Special Reference to Timurid Period* (New Delhi, 1995), 229.

<sup>510</sup> Dalal, *Ethics in Persian Poetry*, 258.

father (b.1826) in his autobiography. According to Roy, Hafiz's poems 'changed' his father's 'mental outlook'. He argued Persian was an important part of the mid-nineteenth century intellectual landscape.<sup>511</sup> Thus, Rammohun's references to Hafiz were an attempt to popularise his ideas among an educated readership.

Poetry was also used to structure the argument of the *Tuhfat*. Consider for example, Rammohun's argument that the presence of many religious sects had led to social conflict, and in the interest of social stability, a belief in one God was more suitable. This argument was explained with reference to Hafiz's verses on the disputes within the seventy two different sects of Islam:

The disputes of the seventy-two sects are to be excused,  
Because they not finding the truth,  
Have trotted the way of fables and nonsense.<sup>512</sup>

Rammohun's use of poetry can also be seen in other arguments in the *Tuhfat*. Consider the for example, the *Tuhfat's* idea of an ethical society. The *Tuhfat's* conception of society shares an important similarity with the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and is also important to our discussion because of its use of Persian poetry as an explanatory device.

We note that according to the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, society referred to a community defined by fairness and consideration for others.<sup>513</sup> We recall from our earlier argument in the Introduction of this chapter that Tusi had argued that although a peaceful, stable society *ought* to be the norm, in practice, society was unethical, conflictual and

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<sup>511</sup>Prafulla Chandra Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (Calcutta, 1935), 1.

<sup>512</sup> *Tuhfat*, 12.

<sup>513</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 189.



unjust.<sup>514</sup> It was in this context that he had advocated the presence of a government which would be concerned with justice and invest in the welfare of its subjects.<sup>515</sup>

Therefore, Tusi's argument for society was two-fold: how an ideal society ought to be, and why government intervention was required in society.

In this context, we note that Rammohun's idea of a society was similar to Tusi's. He too stressed on the idea of a society based on fairness and consideration. And like Tusi, he also referred to the existence of government and argued for laws to protect one's person and property:

Society depends upon individuals understanding the ideas of each other reciprocally and on the existence of some rules by which the property of one is to be defined and distinguished from that of another and one is to be prevented from exercising oppression over another.<sup>516</sup>

Rammohun also explained his ideas concerning society with a the verse (from Hafiz)

Be not after the injury of anyone,  
For the rest you may do as you will,  
For in our way and conduct,  
There is no other sin but this (injuring others).<sup>517</sup>

We note that above verse that did not include any references to governance, laws and property. This is probably because Rammohun had only but briefly touched upon these concepts in the *Tuhfat*. In sharp contrast, his ideas on ethical practice had been developed in considerable detail throughout the tract. This shows that the *Tuhfat* prioritised arguments concerning ethical practice.

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<sup>514</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 196.

<sup>515</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 191.

<sup>516</sup> *Tuhfat*, 6.

<sup>517</sup> *Tuhfat*, 22.

Throughout this section I have tried to argue that the *Tuhfat* was influenced by the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. We note however that the *Tuhfat* does not share any similarity with the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*'s ideas on government (the third discourse) or Tusi's ideas of the household (the second discourse). The focus was squarely on the first discourse, on ethics.

Although Rammohun did not refer to, translate or popularise the *Tuhfat* in any of his subsequent writings, the tract was reprinted in 1859, 1898 and 1918; and translated into Bengali in 1899 and 1949 (by Girish Chandra Sen and Jyotirananda Das respectively) and into English in 1884 and 1906 (by Obaidullah el Obaide and J.C. Ghosh respectively). It was thus a well-known work in 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>518</sup>

As our discussion in the Introduction to this chapter showed, historians are doubtful of the importance of the *Tuhfat*. This has also to do with the method of argument in the tract. For example, B.N. Dasgupta in his analysis of the *Tuhfat* argued that Rammohun 'outgrew' the ideas of the *Tuhfat*.<sup>519</sup> However as the next section will show, the *Tuhfat*'s argument can also be seen in Rammohun's other writings on religion.

### **Section three: The *Tuhfat*'s influence on writings on Hindu scripture, c.1815-29.**

The *Tuhfat*'s ideas feature prominently in Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture in Calcutta (1815-30). His tracts openly questioned the legitimacy of the Brahmins (whom

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<sup>518</sup> See Table 1: Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta, c. 1803-1905, 348-358.

<sup>519</sup> B.N. Dasgupta, *Rajah Rammohun Roy* (Delhi, 1980), 106.

the *Tuhfat* had referred to as *Mujtahids*) stressed the importance of everyday ethical practices (an argument which *Tuhfat* had prioritised).

Rammohun's works on Hindu scripture were however published long after the *Tuhfat*. His earliest work on Hindu scripture, the *Vedāntagrantha* was published twelve years after the *Tuhfat*. The question that arises here is whether Rammohun's ideas had changed or developed in the interim. I argue that the closest we can come to answering this question is by a close examination of the *Vedāntagrantha*.

The *Vedāntagrantha* was written in Bengali and claimed to be a translation of the *Vedānta Sūtras*. The *Vedānta Sūtras* are an important philosophical tradition. They are concerned with the interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*, particularly the concept of *Brahman*. According to Killingley, the *Vedānta Sūtras* can often confuse readers because 'it is a series of notes and headings' and 'its writers do not always cite specific texts or even state the position they wish to refute'. In this situation the commentaries of the *Vedānta Sūtras* occupy an important position for providing clarity, context and developed arguments.<sup>520</sup>

In this context we note that the *Vedāntagrantha* frequently cited a commentary, *Advaita Vedānta* written by the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. thinker, Shankara.<sup>521</sup> Killingley argues that Rammohun's choice of this particular commentary may have been influenced by the fact that Shankara was a familiar historical figure in Bengali society at the time.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Dermot Killingley, 'Rammohun Roy on the *Vedānta Sūtras*', *Religion*, 11(1981), 151.

<sup>521</sup> Killingley, '*Vedānta Sūtras*', 151.

<sup>522</sup> Killingley, '*Vedānta Sūtras*', 151.

In fact, a feature that stood out in the *Vedāntagrantha* was the consistent view it was a literal translation of Shankara's commentary of the *Vedānta Sūtras*.<sup>523</sup>

Killingley has shown however that that Rammohun's claim of a literal translation was false. This is because the *Vedāntagrantha* often abbreviated detailed commentaries in the *Advaita Vedānta* to a few lines.<sup>524</sup> Consider for instance, Rammohun's discussion of the *Brahman*, a crucial point discussion in the *Advaita Vedānta*. Shankara had argued that the *Brahman* was of two types, absolute truth (*pāramārthika*) and practical truth (*vyāvahārika*) in which the latter had external attributes (*upādhi*) which could be comprehended by man while the former was unknowable. Ultimately, Shankara attempted to develop a method by which knowledge of the practical truth could be gained.<sup>525</sup> As we noted above, the development of such a method would have been consistent with the general concern of the *Vedānta Sūtras*.

Rammohun however ignored the distinctions between the absolute truth and the practical truth. This ignorance of important distinctions in Shankara's thought was a pattern rather than an exception in the *Vedāntagrantha*. For example, Rammohun also ignored the various distinctions between *Brahman*, *ātman* and *Īśvara* and considered them all the same.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 151.

This was a view which he also expressed in writings on the *Upaniṣads*. Each translation of the *Upaniṣads* was accompanied by a cover page which insisted that they were merely Bengali and English reproductions of Shankara's commentaries of the *Upaniṣads*. The chapter will end with a discussion of one such translation.

<sup>524</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 155.

<sup>525</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 156-7.

<sup>526</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 155.

It may be argued at this point that if the *Vedāntagrantha* was a tract meant for a broad readership, Rammohun would have been more likely to introduce abbreviations than elaborate on highly complex theological positions. Killingley's study has even shown that although Rammohun skipped complex arguments, he did not contradict or radically deviate from the *Advaita Vedānta* for the majority of the text.<sup>527</sup>

However, in approximately one tenth of the *Advaita Vedānta* (56 *sūtras*), Rammohun 'radically departed' and even contradicted Shankara without acknowledging it. More puzzlingly, his departures were not related to an affiliation or agreement with any of the other commentaries of the *Vedānta Sūtras* (such as the *Viśiṣṭadvaita* of Ramanuja for example).<sup>528</sup>

According to Killingley, Rammohun's departures from Shankara's interpretation of the *Advaita Vedānta* were not noted in contemporary Bengali society because his contemporaries were not familiar with the text. This created a context in which Rammohun 'having stepped into the shoes of Shankara as an authentic expositor' could establish his credentials as a knowledgeable scholar.<sup>529</sup>

Killingley has shown that Rammohun used his unique position to advance positions which completely deviated from the *Advaita Vedānta*. For example, he argued that a key point in the *Advaita Vedānta* is the relation between the soul (*jīva*) and God.<sup>530</sup> This point was however never made by Shankara. Consequently, Rammohun's primary

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<sup>527</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 153.

<sup>528</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 152.

<sup>529</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 165.

<sup>530</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 155.

conclusion that the soul cannot exist without God is an interpretation which is not related to the *Advaita Vedānta* or even the *Vedānta Sūtras*.

In this context, we recall from our discussion in the previous section that the relationship between the soul and God was however an important argument in the first discourse of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, a familiar text in early-nineteenth century Bengal. I argue that it is possible that Rammohun's simplification of the concept of *Brahman* and his idea of the soul is influenced by the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. Seeing it from this perspective also helps us recognise the importance of his religious works in his project of ethics. This is because the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* argued that the realisation of the existence of God and soul was a necessary condition for ethical practice.<sup>531</sup>

A more direct reference to the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* can be seen in Rammohun's ideas of worship. As the Introduction of the chapter noted, the third discourse of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* had expounded on the relationship between the individual and society. Tusi had argued that it was not possible for an individual to *not* live in a society.<sup>532</sup> Society was defined by reciprocity and awareness of one's connection to a wider community. The discourse had concluded that an ethical society was one in which *everyone* was aware of the need to be ethical.<sup>533</sup>

In the *Vedāntagrantha*, Rammohun referred to *the above* argument for ethical practice in society as 'worship' or *atma vidya*. He rejected Shankara's argument that the purpose of worship was a realisation of the self (*atman*, which in the *Advaita Vedānta* is the source of man's consciousness) and instead argued that worship

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<sup>531</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 36.

<sup>532</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 195.

<sup>533</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 190.

referred to the realisation of being a part of a society.<sup>534</sup> Shankara had argued that a realisation of *atman* would help man understand the *Brahman*. Rammohun on the other hand stressed that the practice of ordinary and everyday ‘moral duties’ in society would help understand the *Brahman*.<sup>535</sup> Putting it another way, Rammohun’s argument is a reference to the importance of everyday ethical practice as a form of worship to *Brahman*.

Rammohun’s points and arguments on the nature of worship were a departure from Shankara who argued that only an ascetic (*sanyasin*) could gain knowledge of the *Brahman*, Rammohun disagreed by arguing that ‘purity of mind’ (*citta-suddhi*) is all that was required. His ideal was not the ascetic but the ‘godly householder’ (*brahmanistha grihastha*).<sup>536</sup> The idea of the ‘godly householder’ can be seen as an influence of the second discourse of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. To Tusi, the household was the main basis of the lived experience of the individual. This is because the household was the location of an individual’s wealth, property and family.<sup>537</sup> We recall that Tusi advocated generosity in donating wealth and prudence in looking after one’s property and temperance when dealing with other members of the household, and in effect outlined the qualities of an ethical householder.<sup>538</sup> Since Tusi’s ideas of ethical practice were related to the belief in God, we argue that ‘godly householder’ is also a good description of his ideas.

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<sup>534</sup> Killingley, ‘*Vedānta Sūtras*’, 151.

<sup>535</sup> Killingley, ‘*Vedānta Sūtras*’, 157.

<sup>536</sup> Dermot Killingley, *The Only True God: Bengali and Sanskrit Works on Religion by Rammohun Roy, selected and translated* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1982), 1-6; Killingley, ‘*Vedānta Sūtras*’, 151.

<sup>537</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 156.

<sup>538</sup> *Nasirean Ethics*, 159.

After assessing the points of departure from Shankara, Killingley concluded that Rammohun's interpretation was original and that he was a new interpreter of the *Advaita Vedānta*.<sup>539</sup> Killingley did not however explain why Rammohun chose to depart from Shankara. He only noted that the departure was not due to the influence any other Hindu religious thinker. From our discussion, I argue that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* provides a valuable intellectual context to Rammohun's departure from crucial arguments of the *Advaita Vedānta*.

We note that our discussion of the intellectual context of the *Tuḥfat* in the previous section also highlighted the influence of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. The *Vedāntagrantha's* similarities with the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* thus highlights a common intellectual context in the *Vedāntagrantha* and *Tuḥfat*.

The question that arises here is, is there a case to be made for the similarities between the *Tuḥfat* and the *Vedāntagrantha*? In this context, we briefly note the following similarities in both the tracts. First, both *Vedāntagrantha* and the *Tuḥfat* are an argument for the belief and worship of one God. Second, both works argue that everyday ethical practice is the best form of worship (and do so by de-legitimising the role of religious leaders) and finally, both root their arguments in the public social practices of contemporary Bengali society. These similarities are not immediately apparent because the tracts were written in different languages, and referred to different textual authorities.

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<sup>539</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 155.



The key difference between the *Tuhfat* and *Vedāntagrantha* is that Rammohun was able to explain his ideas in the latter to a broad audience. The introduction of the *Vedāntagrantha* for example contained details on how to read Bangla and implement the ideas of the text in everyday life.<sup>540</sup> Rammohun's subsequent writings in Bengali and English also employed certain strategies to make his ideas more accessible to readers. For example, his English translation of the abridgement of the *Vedāntagrantha* introduced new conceptual vocabularies: the *Advaita Vedānta* was interpreted as 'the rational worship of the God of nature' which was 'confirmed by the dictates of common sense'.<sup>541</sup> For Bengali readers, Rammohun referred to familiar mythical figures such as Vyasa, the (mythical) author of the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, to make his case for the applicability of the reasonableness of his ideas. Both the *Mahābhārata* and Vyasa would also be referred to in other works on Hindu scripture such as the *Upaniṣads*.<sup>542</sup> This is a sharp contrast to the *Tuhfat*, which contained no linguistic instructions and sources. Rather Rammohun *assumed* that the reader was familiar with the languages and concepts employed.

The *Tuhfat* and *Vedāntagrantha* have vastly different levels of visibility in Rammohun's writings. The *Vedāntagrantha* was published in abridged English and Bengali editions (*Translation of the Abridgement of the Vedānta* and *Vedāntasara*). The *Tuhfat* on the other hand was never mentioned again in any other work. Neither was it translated

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<sup>540</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 12.

<sup>541</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 152.

<sup>542</sup> Killingley, 'Vedānta Sūtras', 152.

Also, Rammohun's case was considerably strengthened by the fact that the *Vedānta Sūtras* are traditionally ascribed to Vyasa. Killingley, *Only True God*, 12

into Bengali or English. But was this to do with the specific style of argument of the *Tuhfat*?

In this context, let us briefly consider the structure of the *Tuhfat*. As we mentioned in the previous section, Rammohun used a syllogistic structure of argument in the *Tuhfat*. An investigation of the syllogistic structure of the tract has not been done in detail in current scholarship. Therefore, as an exploratory point, let us consider, the first paragraph of the *Tuhfat*, where Rammohun argued the case for the existence of one God

I travelled the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well as in hilly lands and I found the inhabitants thereof agreeing generally on believing the existence of One Being who is the source of all creation and the governor of it.<sup>543</sup>

From the above passage, we note that, syllogistically, ‘the existence of One Being’ is a universal categorical proposition i.e. Rammohun argued that since the proposition of the belief in one god was universally true, all propositions which contradicted it were false.

From this observation we see that Rammohun’s argument was made by demonstrating the importance of establishing universal categories in arguments. If a proposition was universally true, then it was unquestionably true. Similarly if a proposition was universally false, then it was undeniably false. Further, a false argument could be shown by identifying contradictions.

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<sup>543</sup> *Tuhfat*, 3.

I argue that the methods of the *Tuḥfat* were not abandoned in writings inspired by the *Vedāntagrantha*. Consider for instance, Rammohun's defence of his ideas in the *Translation of the Abridgement of the Vedānta* (henceforth, *Translation*). This tract was an explanation of Rammohun's ideas on worship. Rammohun rejected the idea that rituals had any connection with worship and instead argued that ethical practices (charity, humility and social solidarity) could be seen as worship. The argument for ethical practice in *Translation* was not however accepted by Sivnath Shastri. Shastri argued instead that rituals were sanctioned by Hindu scripture and were thus a better form of worship. In response, Rammohun defended his arguments by arguing that Shastri's interpretation of Hinduism was not viable because it would lead to confusions over contradictory rituals in scripture and stressed that his emphasis on ethical practice was more reasonable because it avoided such contradictions.<sup>544</sup> Thus we note that the *Tuḥfat*'s point about identifying contradictory arguments as evidence of false arguments was retained in the writings which followed it.

This argument also applies to writings other than Hindu scripture, such as the *Dialogue between a Missionary and three Chinese Converts* (henceforth *Dialogue*) written in Calcutta in 1823. The *Dialogue* was a short dialogical tract between a Christian missionary (the denomination and mission is not revealed in the tract) and three recently converted Chinese men (more details on ethnicity and language are not given).<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 197.

<sup>545</sup> The *Dialogue* was written in the wake of Rammohun's writings in 1820 on the Gospels; *The Precepts of Jesus: Extracted from the Books of the New Testament ascribed to the four Evangelists, An Appeal to the Christian public in defence of the Precepts of Jesus by a Friend of Truth and Reply to the observations of the Editor of the Friend of India on the above appeal*. These tracts discussed in detail in chapter six. Here, we focus on the *Dialogue*.

Certain characteristics of the *Dialogue* are markedly different from the *Tuhfat*. For instance, unlike the *Tuhfat* which was never translated, Rammohun also produced a Bengali translation of the *Dialogue*, *Pādri o Śiṣya Samvād*.<sup>546</sup>

What concerns us here, is methodological similarities. Rammohun cited contradictions and inconsistencies as the mainstay of his argument. He argued through satire and humour that the Christian missionary's ideas were inconsistent and that the presence of inconsistencies indicated the presence of contradictions. These arguments can be seen from the following passage of the *Dialogue*. This passage is in the very beginning of the tract:

Missionary: How many Gods are there, my brethren!

1st Convert: Three

2<sup>nd</sup> Convert: Two

3<sup>rd</sup> Convert: None

All [three Converts together]: We know not where you got the religion you taught us but this is what you have taught us.

Missionary: Blasphemous!

Missionary: You must believe not only that there are three persons, each God, and equal in power and glory, but also that these Three are One.

1<sup>st</sup> convert: That is impossible. In China we do not believe in contradictions

Missionary: Brother! It is a mystery

1<sup>st</sup> Convert: Pray, what is?

Missionary: It is- it is- I know not what to say to you, except that it is something which you cannot possibly comprehend.

1<sup>st</sup> Convert (Smiling): And this is what you have been sent 10,000 miles to teach?<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Bhattacharya, 'Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose', 204.

<sup>547</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose (Calcutta, 1885), 291-2.

Thus the *Dialogue* can be seen as an example of the method (which were so marked a feature of the *Tuhfat*) by which Rammohun explained the viability of his argument by pointing out contradictions.<sup>548</sup>

Our discussion of the *Dialogue* shows that Rammohun argued his case by employing humour. The use of humour was not simply a temporary detour from the primary argument, it was also used to frame and contextualise Rammohun's point of view.

The *Dialogue's* approach to humour can also be found in Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture. For example, in the English and Bengali translations of *Īśā Upaniṣad* and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. In both tracts, Rammohun explained his ideas about social practices influenced by rituals by humorously referring to contemporary Hinduism as the practice of 'observances of a peculiar form of diet'.<sup>549</sup> Rammohun also referred to this theme in *The Universal Religion: Religious Instructions founded on sacred authorities* (1819) where he criticised ritual and advocated the reasonableness of his own political project by humorously opining that 'it is certainly far more preferable to adorn the mind than to think of purifying the belly'.<sup>550</sup> The phrase 'adorn the mind' brings to mind his reference to *atma-vidya* as a form of knowledge of the *Brahman* in the *Vedantāgrantha*. The *Universal Religion* can be seen as a clear case of humour being used to advocate the importance of a key argument of ethics.

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<sup>548</sup> Rammohun also extended the scope of this method in the *Dialogue* since contradictions in the ideas of the Christian Missionary were highlighted to draw attention to a new context which had not explored in the *Tuhfat*- the idea of distance. Rammohun's references to distance highlight unfamiliarity. In the above passage for example, the 1<sup>st</sup> convert cites the '10,000 miles' of travel made by the Christian missionary to emphasise his point about the incomprehensibility of an unfamiliar idea from an unfamiliar land. This argument will be seen in detail in chapter six. It has also been developed in chapter one.

<sup>549</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose (Calcutta, 1885), 51-2 and 102.

<sup>550</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose (Calcutta, 1885), 160.

Current scholarship on literary history of the early nineteenth century however does not agree with the argument presented here. Sudipta Kaviraj for example, argued that Rammohun's writings were dry and tedious to read.<sup>551</sup> In the light of our discussion above, we can assert that Kaviraj's ideas can be qualified.

Just as humour and satire were used to make his writings more accessible, Rammohun also referred to familiar social practices and theological concepts to provide a sense of familiarity to his ideas. Thus, his works on Hindu scripture as well as Bengali commentaries on social practices, *Reply to a Goswāmīn* (*Gosvāmīr sahit vicār* 1818) and *Reply to Utsavānanda* (*Utsavānader sahit vicār*, 1816) contained references to familiar everyday social practices such as religious rituals (*puja*), worship (*upasana*); contemporary sects such as *Saiva* (the worshippers of god *Siva*), *Sakta* (the worshippers of the goddess *Sakti*) and *Vaishnava* (the cult of *Krishna* founded by Caitanya, 1485-1533); theological concepts such as salvation (*mukti*), soul (*jiva*); and familiar figures such as Vyasa (the mythical author of the *Mahābhārata*), texts such as *Bhāgvata Purāṇa* and *Bhagvadgītā*; and verses, such as *Gāyatrī* (which was 'recited daily in prayers' during this period in Bengal).<sup>552</sup>

Rammohun also introduced changes in his use of the Bengali language to make his ideas more accessible. According to Pradyumna Bhattacharya, a study of Rammohun's use of the Bengali language shows that he consciously followed a policy of using

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<sup>551</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-Ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature', *Modern Asian Studies*, 34 (2000), 382.

<sup>552</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 19-21; 30-45.

Also, we note that tracts on Hindu scripture which were not translated into English such as the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* demonstrate this argument clearly. Popular concepts such as *Jiva* and popular texts such as *Bhagvadgītā* and *Bhāgvata Purāṇa* are employed to explain Rammohun's arguments concerning One God. Killingley, *Only True God*, 23, 25-6.

simplified grammar in order to make his writings more comprehensible. Rammohun split long compounds into smaller words (for example, *guner anusare* instead of *gunanusare*).<sup>553</sup>

Rammohun even specified his ideas on the use and purpose of language in *Reply to a Bhaṭṭācāryya* (*Bhaṭṭācāryyer sahita vicāra*, 1817). He defended his use of the Bengali language to explain Hindu scripture by arguing that ‘the doctrines of the *Vedānta* and the contents of the *Upaniṣads* are put into the vernacular so that the *sarvvasadharan lok* [Bengali public] may understand their meaning’.<sup>554</sup>

The distinct position taken by Rammohun can be better clarified when compared with the works of the best known Bengali prose writer in during this period, Mrityunjay Vidyalankar. Vidyalankar was the author of *Batrīś Siṃhāsan* (1803); and *Rājāvalī* (1808), a history of India compiled from the *Purāṇas* (ancient mythological texts which were being translated in the early-nineteenth century).<sup>555</sup> According to Partha Chatterjee, the *Rājāvalī* is ‘the first Bengali history written by a native that we have in print’.<sup>556</sup> Thus, Vidyalankar, like Rammohun, was a proponent of the use of Bengali for exploring new fields of enquiry.

Vidyalankar’s idea of Bengali was that it could not be used for discussions on Hindu scripture. He also included the employment of long words in his writings. For instance, consider Vidyalankar’s use of the word

*kupitakapikapolavarnapadmaksamurtydyasanatei* in *Vedānta Candrikā* (1817).<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Bhattacharya, ‘Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose’, 201.

<sup>554</sup> Bhattacharya, ‘Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose’, 202.

<sup>555</sup> Bhattacharya, ‘Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose’, 197.

<sup>556</sup> Partha Chatterjee, ‘History and the Nationalization of Hinduism’, *Social Research*, 59 (1992), 111-49.

<sup>557</sup> Bhattacharya, ‘Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose’, 202.

According to Bhattacharya, the use of such long words is not an exception, but rather illustrative of Vidyalkar's style of writing Bengali. In a comparative style analysis of *Bhaṭṭācāryya sahita vicāra* and *Vedānta Candrikā*, Bhattacharya showed that Vidyalkar consistently used longer words than Rammohun. Bhattacharya noted that the use of long words also indicates that Vidyalkar was writing for an exclusive, elite readership, while Rammohun's insistence of a simplified grammar for the Bengali public (or *sarvvasadharan lok*) shows the opposite.

In spite of the humour and the satire, the basic structure of Rammohun's arguments in writings on Hindu scripture was the same as the *Tuḥfat*. For example, just as the *Tuḥfat*, Rammohun also used the category of 'nature' in his writings on Hindu scripture. A comparative textual analysis of the *Tuḥfat* and Rammohun's English translation of the *Īśā Upaniṣad* highlights this argument in detail.

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* was published in 1816 at Calcutta. Significantly, its introduction and preface mainly dealt with his observations on contemporary Bengali society than a scholarly Introduction of the scripture. As Dermot Killingley observed, this was not unusual. Rammohun's introductions and prefaces to his translations of scripture were largely concerned with his own opinions of religious practices in contemporary Bengali society.<sup>558</sup>

The *Īśā Upaniṣad's* stylistics was different from the *Tuḥfat*. While the *Tuḥfat* argued in a formal system of propositional assessment, the *Īśā Upaniṣad* was written in an informal conversational style. Rammohun also introduced an element of drama in the

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<sup>558</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 1-6.



main text of the translation with selective capitalisation and italicisation of sentences to argue that the practice of religious observances is not desirable:

Let man desire to live a whole century, practising, in this world, religious rites, because for such A SELFISH MIND AS THINE besides the observances of these rites, there is no other mode the practice of which would not subject thee to such evils. THOSE THAT NEGLECT THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE SUPREME SPIRIT *either by devoting themselves solely to the performance of ceremonies of religion, or by living destitute of religious ideas, shall after death, ASSUME THE STATE OF DEMONS such as that of the celestial gods and of other created beings WHICH ARE SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS OF IGNORANCE.*<sup>559</sup> (Formatting as in the original)

We note that the *Īśā Upaniṣad* and the *Tuḥfat* were written for different audiences and employed different literary styles, a methodological continuity can be seen in the employment of the categories of ‘nature’ and ‘habit’. For example the introduction to the *Īśā Upaniṣad* also highlighted the differences between nature and habit:

Hindus of the present age with very few exceptions have not the least idea that it is to [those] attributes of the supreme Being [which are] figuratively represented by shapes corresponding to the nature of those attributes [that] they offer adoration and worship under the denomination of gods and goddesses. On the contrary, the slightest investigation will satisfy every enquirer that it makes a material part of their system to hold as articles of faith all those particular circumstances which are essential to belief in the independent existence of the objects of their idolatry as deities clothed with divine power.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman ii, 53.

<sup>560</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 44. This explanatory scheme is also found in other translations of Hindu scripture. In the Preface to the *Vedānta too* Rammohun writes of contemporary religious practices with bitter irony and his emphasis on their ‘peculiarity’ emphasises to the reader that they ought to be avoided. Given the cross reference to his contemporary publications, the recovery of authorial intention is therefore possible in his translation of the *Īśā Upaniṣad*.

Rammohun opined that contemporary Bengali society was not aware that their religious practices of worshipping multiple denominations of gods and goddesses ('habit') were but a part of the 'attributes of the Supreme Being' ('nature'). We note that just as in the *Īśā Upaniṣad*, the *Tuḥfat* too referred to 'habit' as the practice of 'giving attributes' which led to social conflict. Thus the employment of 'nature' and 'habit' demonstrates a vital point of conceptual continuity in the *Īśā Upaniṣad* from the *Tuḥfat*.

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* did not only employ the categories of the *Tuḥfat* but the deep structure of the text was also influenced by the *Tuḥfat*. Consider for example, the *Tuḥfat*'s views on the origin and analysis of conflict. The *Tuḥfat* argued that the origin of conflictual practices was the interventions ('falsehood' and 'miracles') of the *Ulema* and *Brahmin* community in contemporary Bengal.<sup>561</sup>

[In the contemporary religions of Bengal] to strengthen the belief of its followers in the two doctrines [the existence of the soul and of heaven and hell]; hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating and drinking, purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness have been *added* [as religious practices by ecclesiastical authorities]. These *additions*, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society have instead become causes of injury and are thus detrimental to social life and therefore sources of trouble in society.<sup>562</sup> (Italics mine).

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* articulated the same argument:

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<sup>561</sup> *Tuḥfat*, 9.

<sup>562</sup> *Tuḥfat*, 7.

[...] The chief part of [...] Hinduism, I am sorry to say is made to consist in the adoption of a peculiar mode of diet; the least aberration from which (even though the conduct of the offender may be in other respects be pure and blameless) is not only visited with severest censure but actually punished by exclusion from the society of his family and friends.<sup>563</sup>

Further, like the *Tuḥfat*, the *Īśā Upaniṣad* also criticised the Brahmins for promoting religious practices which led to conflict. Significantly, such religious practices were termed as 'habits'.

The [...] principal arguments which are alleged [by the Brahmin community] in favour of idolatry is that it is established by custom. 'Let the authors of the *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, *Tantras*', it is said, 'assert what they may in favour of support to the Supreme Being but idol worship has been practiced for several centuries that custom renders it proper to continue that worship'. It is however evident to everyone possessed of common sense that custom or fashion is quite different from divine faith; the latter preceding from spiritual authorities and correct reasoning and the former merely the fruit of vulgar practice.<sup>564</sup>

Rammohun outlined a political project in this passage. He rejected the practices of the Brahmins as illegitimate and recommended that the reader do the same. He noted that objections against his ideas had already been raised in Bengali society (he had been writing in Calcutta since 1815) but also alluded to a community of supporters who agreed with him. In the *Tuḥfat*, Rammohun had addressed a Persian educated readership and criticised the interpretation of ecclesiastical authorities much the same way. Our discussion shows that that the *Īśā Upaniṣad* cannot be seen as separate from

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<sup>563</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 51.

<sup>564</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 48.

the *Tuḥfat*. We conclude that the *Tuḥfat* and the *Īśā Upaniṣad* were a part of a political project of reform and a will to act against the role of ecclesiastical authority.

Like the *Dialogue* and *Religious Instructions*, the *Īśā Upaniṣad* also featured literary techniques such as irony and sarcasm and appeals to ‘common sense’ and ‘morality’ to *explain* to a broader readership that contemporary religious practices should be reconceptualised as everyday ethical practices.<sup>565</sup> This was the key difference between the *Tuḥfat* and subsequent writings.

Rammohun’s translations in Calcutta were also more direct than the *Tuḥfat*. For example, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1819) suggested that ‘liberal humanness’ was an example of good conduct and referred to the Brahmins as ‘self-interested pretended guides’ and ‘those fools who are immersed in ignorance that is the foolish practices of rites [...] are like blind men guided by a blind man’.<sup>566</sup> The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* also appealed to the ‘common sense perspective of man’ to explain its argument against the Brahminical interpretation of scripture.<sup>567</sup> The term ‘common sense’ articulated his basic argument that Hindu scripture was not comprised of abstract, metaphysical doctrines but framed familiar political and social ideas into a coherent and unified body of thought. Rammohun also emphasised that the *Vedas* discussed topics and disciplines such as astronomy, medicine and botany which contemporary society was familiar with thus showing that they were not concerned with only theology.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> S.N. Mukherjee, ‘Class, Caste and Politics in India’, in S.N. Mukherjee and Edmund Leach (eds.), *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970), 37-40.

<sup>566</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 1- 2.

<sup>567</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 48.

<sup>568</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 88.

Rammohun's attempts to demystify Hindu scripture however invited criticism at Calcutta and Madras. Critics particularly questioned two aspects of his translations: First, the authenticity of his translations from Sanskrit; and second, the point of translating ancient scriptures at all. This prompted the defence of his methods of interpretation. In response, Rammohun argued that:

The point of being able to perceive the existence of God is to be able to do so in a way that is best calculated towards substantial material advantages.<sup>569</sup>

Thus, Rammohun related scripture to the everyday 'material' world of his readers. He also argued that scripture had a contemporary political relevance.

I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest [...] It is I think necessary for some change to take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.<sup>570</sup>

Rammohun's defence of his project can be seen in, *Second Defence of the Monotheistical system of the Vedas in reply to the present state of Hindu worship, An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude Independent of Brahminical Observances, The Universal Religion: Religious Instructions founded on sacred authorities, Humble suggestions to his countrymen who believe in one true God and Translation of a Sanskrit Tract on the Different Modes of Worship*. These writings display a very visible anxiety to be *the* correct translation of scripture. The translation of the

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<sup>569</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, eds. Nag and Burman, 116.

<sup>570</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, eds. Nag and Burman, iv, 94.

*Vedāntagrantha* alone was followed by two lengthy defences highlighting claims to authenticity.<sup>571</sup>

Rammohun's anxiety is also indicator of a larger intellectual context in Bengal; a public sphere which consisted of parallel traditions of oral debate and written vernacular and English newspapers and journals.<sup>572</sup> This can be seen in the newspaper reporting of a case which occurred two years after the *Vedāntagrantha* had been published.

According to the *Calcutta Journal*, the case involved the final words of a Calcutta resident, Radhamohun Ghoshal. Ghoshal made a 'public confession' of belief in the *Vedānta* before dying.<sup>573</sup> He refused to have any religious ceremonies performed, confessing 'with shame' that he had encouraged such ceremonies and rituals throughout his life for selfish motives and he now understood them to be 'a mere mockery of the true God who is the true source of all our faculties and whose nature is incomprehensible'.<sup>574</sup>

In this context, I would like to draw attention to Radhamohun Ghoshal's 'public confession' and Rammohun's ideas on religion. Radhamohun did not acknowledge religion as a domain restricted to close family or even private prayer, but rather as a public social practice, informed by conscious decisions and choices. Ghoshal's 'shame' while acknowledging his 'self-interested motives' implicitly refers to his new belief in

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<sup>571</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 19-21; 31-45. Rammohun Roy's Bengali tracts were distributed in contemporary Calcutta society as a response to the criticism of his social and religious ideas in contemporary Bengali society.

<sup>572</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 2. 'Though several of his [Rammohun's] English works were published in his own name, he did not put his name to any of his Bengali and Sanskrit works. However external and internal evidence suggest that these works were composed by Rammohun; his authorship seems to have been an open secret in his time.'

<sup>573</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selection from Records, 1775-1845*, ed. J.K. Majumdar (Calcutta, 1941), 12-14.

<sup>574</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 14.

an alternative interpretation of religion which is based on wider concerns of social welfare. We note in this context that Ghoshal was a Brahmin, and Rammohun's writings frequently described Brahminical ritualistic practices as a result of 'self-interested motives'. In this case, Ghoshal's 'public confession' amounted to a declaration that Rammohun's strategy of reaching out to a public with his writings on religion would lead to observable, everyday changes in social practice in Bengali society.

By the time of the Radhamohun Ghoshal case of 1817, Rammohun had produced his translations of the *Īśā*, *Kena* and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads*. His works were commented upon and critiqued in contemporary newspapers such as the *Calcutta Journal*, *Calcutta Monthly Journal*, *Missionary Register* and *Government Gazette*.

I argue that a close analysis of newspaper reports on Rammohun's writings show that some contemporary observers also perceived Rammohun's religious writings as an argument for ethical practice. For example, the *Calcutta Journal's* reference to the Radhamohun Ghoshal case was made by reviewing Rammohun's recently published translation of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. Reflecting on both the case and the translation, the *Calcutta Journal* opined that:

The unremitted exertions of this intelligent individual [Rammohun] to reclaim his countrymen from their present state of delusion and ignorance deserve the highest praise; and although the success of his labours may not keep pace with his efforts- we are persuaded that in a short time they will perceive their beneficial effects. [...] If the wealthier and more intelligent classes of Hindus [such as Radhamohun Ghoshal] can be convinced that the worship of their multifarious idols is inconsistent with the precepts contained in the writings which they

venerate and hold sacred, if they can be persuaded that the ceremonials to which they sacrifice their time and property will not produce any benefit to them either now or hereafter and if they can be induced to pay their devotion to One God whose attributes they can comprehend and revere we may look with confidence for a thorough reform in their system of morals.<sup>575</sup>

The *Calcutta Journal* informed its readers of an upcoming project of Rammohun's, namely the English translation of an abridgement of the *Vedāntagrantha*, and opined that it would be available soon.<sup>576</sup> This shows that Rammohun's ideas of the *Advaita Vedānta* were eagerly anticipated by an English speaking readership.

Rammohun did not only want to reach out to an English speaking readership. He was adamant that his project of translation was meant to be read by the Bengali public. He argued that the Brahmins of Bengal had lost touch with the 'generality' of the Bengali population. By publishing and *translating* scripture, Rammohun argued that he was not a member of a distant elite:

I have translated into Bengali; the *Vedānta*, the *Kena Upaniṣad* of the *Sama Veda*, the *Īśā Upaniṣad* of the *Yajur Veda* with the contents of which none but the most learned men [Brahmins and European orientalist scholars] are acquainted.<sup>577</sup>

Inherent in this argument was the assumption that the public would respond to Rammohun's ideas. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* for example, Rammohun mentioned his efforts to distribute his translations as widely as possible. In this case we argue that if the authorial intention of the translations was to highlight the case for reform of

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<sup>575</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar 14-17.

<sup>576</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar 12.

<sup>577</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 85.



contemporary cultural practices, one condition to this argument was the wide availability of a correct translations. Another condition, would have to be a consistent, unambiguous focus on ethics.

In this context, we draw attention to the fact, that just as the *Tuhfat* and *Vedāntagrantha*, Rammohun's other tracts on Hindu scripture also consistently reinterpreted the category of worship as a case for everyday ethical practice. This can be clearly seen in *Gāyatrī*, published in 1827 (ten years after the *Vedāntagrantha*). In *Gāyatrī*, Rammohun defined religious faith in Hindu scripture as consciousness of the divine in the individual.<sup>578</sup> The divine ('Supreme Being'), Rammohun argued, 'governed' the material world through the consciousness of the individuals.<sup>579</sup> By this he meant that the Supreme Being had the same control over the universe as the individual had over his body. A realisation of this analogy in the individual would lead to 'consciousness of the divine' or *Oṃ Tat Sat*.

Rammohun interpreted *Oṃ Tat Sat* as 'the three terms [which] collectively imply that the object [everyday life] when contemplated through *Oṃ* [the divine] described what was existing'.<sup>580</sup> 'Described as what was existing' is a rather vague phrase, but when contextualised against Rammohun's intended readership (the public) and his political project (of reform of contemporary social practices), his argument becomes clearer. *Oṃ Tat Sat* literally meant that the worship of the Supreme Being was only possible through ethical practices. The *Gāyatrī* also denounced the role of the Brahmins as unnecessary mediators between the individual and the divine.

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<sup>578</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 75.

<sup>579</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 76.

<sup>580</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 77.

Rammohun also consistently argued against the Brahmins in his writings and instead highlighted the case for an individual interpretation of religion. The arguments of *Tuḥfat* and *Gāyatrī* for example can also be seen in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*.

Rammohun argued that the Brahmins ('self-interested guides') by defying Hindu scripture ('sacred books') had advocated practices which were not inspired by 'nature' (or belief in one God). Their religious practices were thus illegitimate. The *Tuḥfat* had argued that 'mankind' could easily distinguish between the 'truth and untruth' based on his 'natural inclination'. Rammohun's interpretation of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* was arguing the same.

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* explained the practice of illegitimate religious practices as unethical conduct ('total destruction of the moral principle [resulting in] criminal intercourse'). Even 'murder' was seen as illegitimate *religious* practice.<sup>581</sup> The tract also cited other texts. We examine these in turn with a view to identify Rammohun's position in relation to the general public (whom he addressed) and the Brahminical community (whom he criticised).<sup>582</sup> The first was his translation of the *Kena Upaniṣad* (1819). As with the *Īśā Upaniṣad*, the Introduction of the *Kena Upaniṣad* was not a scholarly introduction to the text, but rather concerned with Rammohun's critique on contemporary practices in Bengali society.

This work [translation of the *Kena Upaniṣad* into English] will, I trust, by explain to my countrymen the real spirit of the Hindu scriptures [and] correct the erroneous conceptions which have prevailed with regard to the doctrines which they inculcate. It will also, I hope, tend to discriminate those parts of the *Vedas* which are to be interpreted in an allegorical

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<sup>581</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 1.

<sup>582</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 1.

sense and consequently to correct those exceptionable practices which not only deprive the Hindus in general the common comforts of society (A Hindu of caste can only eat once between sunrise and sunset, cannot eat dressed victuals in a boat or a ship, nor clothed, nor in a tavern nor any food that has been touched by a different caste, nor if interrupted resume his meal) but also frequently lead them to self-destruction (as at Prayag, Ganga Sagar and under the wheels of the car of Jagannath) or to the sacrifice (as for instance, persons whose recovery from sickness is supposed to be doubtful, are carried to die on the banks of the Ganges).<sup>583</sup>

The *Kena Upaniṣad* referred to contemporary practices as 'erroneous conceptions' leading to the deprivation of 'common comforts of society' and warned against the effects (they led to 'sacrifice' and suicide). It summarised the key aspects of Rammohun's project- the criticism of Brahminical religious practices, the interpretation of religion as ethical conduct and the reference to sacrifice as illegitimate religious practices. It did not however clarify Rammohun's role as a translator.

Rammohun's critics (such as Sivanath Sastri,) however forced him to declare his position. This prompted the publication of *The Defence of Hindu Theism* in 1817 where Rammohun (untruthfully) declared:

In none of my writings nor in any of my verbal discussions have I ever pretended to reform or discover the doctrine of the unity of God nor have I ever assumed the title of reformer or discoverer so far from such an assumption.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 15.

<sup>584</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 83.

Rammohun did however identify his position as that of a Brahmin. He argued that the key difference between his ideas and the contemporary Brahmin community was that he stressed on intuitive belief (or 'nature') instead of the control and regulation of religious practices (or 'habit'). Rammohun's self-identification as a 'Brahmin' was an argument for the legitimacy of his interpretation of scripture. For example, he claimed to have interpreted the literal meaning of scripture as ethics in *Second defence of the Vedānta*:

[...] the Sanskrit word which signifies 'works' is not meant to be understood [...] as [...] actions of moral merit. [...] Hindus use the term in their theology only to denote religious rites and ceremonies prescribed by Hindu law-givers which are often irreconcilable with the commonly received maxims of moral duty.<sup>585</sup>

The passage is evidence of Rammohun's attempt to reinterpret rituals as ethics. He also pointed to a larger argument by referring to texts of statescraft and administration, the *Dharmaśāstras* ('Hindu law givers'). This meant that Rammohun did not conceptualise systems of law and government to be separate from issues of everyday social ethics. His political thought of ethics and government can be clearly seen here to be linked. Further, Rammohun even identified his political project with the *Vedic* and *Dharmaśāstra* intellectual tradition.<sup>586</sup>

I, in common with the *Vedas*, *Vedānta* and Manu, the best of lawgivers as well as the most celebrated Shankara deny [that] ceremonies are necessary to obtain knowledge.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>585</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 100.

<sup>586</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 92.

<sup>587</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 87.

Rammohun identified his project with a variety of textual traditions- scripture (*Vedas*), religious philosophy (*Vedānta*), scriptural commentary (Shankara) and lawmakers (Manu). The inclusion of Manu is noteworthy. It shows that the (mythical) author of the Early-Indian legal text, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* was seen in the same context as religious scripture and philosophy. In the next chapter, this point is examined in detail. Here we consider Rammohun's translation of Shankara's commentaries of the *Upaniṣads*.

Rammohun did not literally translate Shankara's commentaries of the *Upaniṣads* (although he argued that he did). Unsurprisingly, Rammohun's 'departures' from Shankara's commentary of the *Upaniṣads* was judged harshly by his critics. Mrityunjay Vidyalankar for example argued that Rammohun's ideas were an innovation.<sup>588</sup> Vidyalankar had a point, as our discussion of Rammohun's translation of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* will show.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* was published in 1819 at Calcutta. It was an important text since it contained evidence of the success of Rammohun's project of translating scripture:

A great body of my countrymen possessed of good understanding and not much fettered with prejudices, being perfectly satisfied with the truth of the doctrines contained in this and other works already laid by me before them and on the gross errors of the puerile system of idol worship which they were led to follow have altered their religious conduct in a manner becoming the dignity of human beings while advocates of idolatry prefer fashion to custom of

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<sup>588</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 84.

their scriptures and practice a system that destroys to the utmost degree the natural texture of society.<sup>589</sup>

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* emphasised the importance of public debate of social practices and outlined Rammohun's concept of societal ethics, everyday conduct, laws and regulations in contemporary society. As in *Translation* (1816), the Brahmin in this case too was seen as an advocate of idolatry. As in the *Tuḥfat*, the religious practices advocated by the religious leaders, the Brahmins was interpreted as symptomatic of the destruction of the 'texture' of social relations.

I argue that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* can be read as an example of how Rammohun viewed the role of scripture in contemporary society as part of a larger project of reform. For example, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* discussed the case for abolishing of female infanticide in Bengal and referred to the translation of the *Kena Upaniṣad* for more details.<sup>590</sup>

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad's* narrative centred on a conversation between Nachiketa, a Brahmin; and Yama, the god of death. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* was not a monologue by Yama to Nachiketa, but rather a system of ideas which were articulated through debate. In the course of the debate, Yama was shown to be reluctant to answer Nachiketa's questions on *Vedic* scripture. Nachiketa's perseverance however won over Yama's reluctance:

The Liberal minded Yama [...] offered Nachiketa an extensive empire on earth. [...] When Nachiketa refused, Yama replied, 'the knowledge that you seek cannot be obtained through perishable means [rites and sacrifices] but will be obtained only by he who is well versed in the

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<sup>589</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 26.

<sup>590</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 5.

sacred scriptures. I will perform the worship [for you] whereby I became possessed of this sovereignty of long duration.<sup>591</sup>

Inherent in the passage is the rather radical idea that if bettered in a debate, it was possible for even gods to reveal the information that mortals asked for, however reluctant they may be to do so. The language of the translation shows that the text was not merely an appeal to an ancient *Upaniṣad* tradition since its narrative context and chief characters were described in contemporary phraseology.

The themes of 'Empire', 'liberal minded' and 'sovereignty' were however more than mere literary tropes in Rammohun's writings. The employment of these terms alluded to a political context. The 'liberal minded' Yama was clearly the authority in the passage since he was able to offer the 'Empire' to Nachiketa. However, Nachiketa did not want the 'Empire' but 'sovereignty'. When the 'Liberal minded' Yama consented, he explained the 'long duration of sovereignty' to Nachiketa. Nachiketa was seen here as an ethical individual who ultimately emerged victorious despite the unequal relations of power with Yama.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* addressed a contemporary context by referring to terms such as 'Empire' and 'liberal mindedness'. The new rulers, Rammohun hoped, were 'liberal minded' enough to grant greater levels of political power to the inhabitants. The way to achieve greater concessions from the ruling authorities, he informed the natives, was a persistent and ethical commitment to one's political project.

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<sup>591</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 26-9.

## Conclusion

Current scholarship on Rammohun's political thought and religious writings has persuasively argued that he was an elite thinker and that the readership of his writings was restricted to native elites and Company officials. This view has been put forward in the works of Dermot Killingley, Sumit Sarkar, Bruce Robertson, Partha Chatterjee, Andrew Sartori, and Barun De. Their arguments are also based on a powerful assumption- that to understand Rammohun's writings, his readers required to be print-literate.

However, this chapter has shown that, contrary to current scholarly interpretations, Rammohun's intended readership was not restricted to the native elites and Company officials. Rather, his writings addressed the Bengali public (*sarvvasadharan lok*, ordinary people). Drawing on the findings of recent research on the history of the book which show that the public sphere of early-nineteenth century Bengal was structured by a diversity of oral practices which responded, borrowed, consolidated and at times even posed an alternative to print culture, I argue that Rammohun was 'oral-literate' i.e. his writings appealed to traditions of orality and practices of reading aloud.<sup>592</sup> In this case, it is not the print literacy of his readers that is important, but rather the level to which he was oral-literate enough to be able to reach out to his audience.

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<sup>592</sup> The term 'oral-literate' was coined by V. Narayan Rao. Cited in Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xiv.



Rammohun's writings contain some important evidence of his oral-literacy. First, the fact that a large number of his works were humorous, informal, dramatic, ironical, sarcastic, consistent and short would have made them easy to narrate and read aloud. Second, Rammohun also introduced linguistic innovations in his writings to aid the process. In contrast to his contemporaries, he wrote in shorter sentences, used smaller words, and worked towards ensuring a greater clarity of prose. As Pradyumna Bhattacharya pointed out, Rammohun's Bengali became progressively clearer and simpler through the 1820's.<sup>593</sup> Third, the free availability of his writings in the popular press meant that they could also be easily circulated. Rammohun's strategies yielded some success since his writings were in fact circulated, and reprinted in the popular press during his lifetime and by private publishers in the decades after his death.

Rammohun's writings for the Bengali public had a consistent narrative thread: without exception they *all* stressed that the public *must* be ethical. This argument was the articulation of his political thought of ethics and ethical practice.

Rammohun's ideas of ethics was influenced by the philosophy of *akhlāq*, particularly the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, the most well-known text of the genre and the political philosophy of the Mughal Empire. The *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was taught in *madrasas* throughout Mughal dominions from the reign of Akbar. It became an important text for the Mughal bureaucracy during Akbar's reign continued to be so during the reigns of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurungzeb. The importance of this Persian text was also in the context of a larger development. Under the Mughals, the Persian language was elevated to the

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<sup>593</sup> Bhattacharya, 'Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose', 206.

status of a 'state language'.<sup>594</sup> This led to the creation of a Persian intellectual culture in Mughal India. As Kumkum Chatterjee noted:

The use of Persian as a state language inaugurated the trend among many Hindu/scribal communities to take up the study of Persian on account of career related opportunities associate with it. There were widespread results due to the territorial extent and administrative penetration of the Mughal Empire.<sup>595</sup>

According Chatterjee, in Bengal, 'the Persian intellectual culture instituted by Akbar and his successors' continued to have an important influence on the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century, even after the advent of the East India Company'.<sup>596</sup> Rammohun Roy, Ram Comul Sen and other members of the Hindu/scribal community were thus a part of a Persian native elite. In this context, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was a familiar text in early-nineteenth century Bengal and widely seen as part of a Persian intellectual context of philosophy, ethics and poetry. Its influence can be clearly seen in Rammohun's first work, the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn*. The *Tuḥfat*'s key arguments concerning ethical practice, the human soul and belief in one God bear a striking resemblance to the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*.

The *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is also important to our argument because it provides a different intellectual context to Rammohun's ideas. In current scholarship, Rammohun is almost always seen as a modern thinker (Partha Chatterjee), a harbinger of modernity (Sumit Sarkar and Andrew Sartori), a father of modern India (Bruce Robertson) and the first

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<sup>594</sup>Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 219.

<sup>595</sup>Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 219.

<sup>596</sup> Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 218.

Indian Liberal (Christopher Bayly). Consequently, a discussion of his intellectual context is almost always restricted to his 'encounter with modernity'.

But Rammohun was also a product of a *madrasa* education and as the chapter highlighted, the *madrasas* were important centres of early-modern thought where a diversity of political and literary traditions (of which the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is just one) was taught. While this chapter might have inadvertently suggested that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is the only influence on Rammohun's thought, I wish to stress that my arguments are only exploratory. The larger question, which is yet to be researched more thoroughly, is the influence of early-modern thought on Rammohun Roy.

The *Tuḥfat*'s ideas concerning the human soul and its relationship to conduct, worship, criticism of religious leaders, and concern with accessibility were developed and explained in Rammohun's subsequent works in greater detail. The *Tuḥfat* also introduced methods and techniques (such as the conceptual categories of 'nature' and 'habit') which continued to feature in later writings. The similarities in method and argument were not incidental, but evidence of a political project. They show that Rammohun's writings on religion, whether in Arabic, Persian, Bengali or English had a common basis. In current scholarship, the *Tuḥfat* is seen as an isolated work. However, the arguments noted above show that the *Tuḥfat* is at the heart of Rammohun's political project.

The chapter concludes that throughout his writings, from the *Tuḥfat* in 1803 to the writings on Hindu scripture from 1815-30, Rammohun articulated a clear, consistent political project which was concerned with ethical practice to a Bengali public. And as the publication data of the period indicates, the public responded.

In the next chapter, I will be looking into the idea of accountability in Rammohun's writings. Rammohun held the Company accountable for the welfare of its subjects in India. This was an important aspect of his political thought. And as the next chapter will show in greater detail, his ideas of accountability were linked to his project of ethics.

## Chapter Four- The *Dharmaśāstras*: Rammohun's theory of state, governance and accountability in Bengal

### Introduction

The previous chapter on the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* and writings on Hindu scripture showed that Rammohun interpreted religion as a case for everyday ethical practice in Bengali society. This chapter focuses on a body of texts which Rammohun referred to as Hindu scripture as well as texts of governance- the *Dharmaśāstras*.<sup>597</sup>

I argue that Rammohun's ideas of state, governance and accountability in Bengal was based on his interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras*. Rammohun argued that a Bengali public could hold the Company accountable for its government much better than its distant and invisible overseers in London (such as the Board of Control and the Court of Directors). His writings addressed two distinct groups - Company officials and the Bengali public. Since neither group was well versed with the complexities of *Dharmaśāstric* conceptual vocabulary, Rammohun explained his arguments to both groups using terms, concepts and contexts that were familiar with.

Rammohun's interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras* has to be seen in its intellectual context. As Brian Hatcher has shown, from 1820-80, the *Dharmaśāstras* were texts of debate amongst Sanskrit *pandits* and native intellectuals.<sup>598</sup> During this period, the

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<sup>597</sup>Recent research by Patrick Olivelle has shown that Rammohun's interpretation was correct. According to Olivelle, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* even *introduced* the concept of interpreting Hindu scripture and governance as part of the same concern. He argues that the text was not only concerned with statescraft, administration and judicial procedure but also with religious and social practices. Patrick Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', in Patrick Olivelle (ed.) *Between the Empires* (Oxford, 2006), 185.

<sup>598</sup> Brian A. Hatcher, 'Pandits at work: The modern Shastric imaginary in early colonial Bengal', in Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (eds.), *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, (Oxford, 2012), 45-6.

*Dharmaśāstras* were not interpreted from the standpoint of a classical liberal or conservative ideology, but rather as an attempt to ‘explore’ new social contexts, practices and colonial technologies.<sup>599</sup> Using the *Dharmaśāstras*, native intellectuals articulated their views on ‘the existing norms of textual authority, social order, debate and argumentation to engage with an emerging set of colonial policies, institutions, material tools and professional opportunities’.<sup>600</sup> Thus, native intellectuals did not only ‘appeal’ to the *Dharmaśāstras* but also ‘worked with the *Śāstras*’ to interpret new perspectives and ideas of ‘rapidly changing norms of epistemology, government and law’.<sup>601</sup>

Specifically, in early-nineteenth century Bengal, the *Dharmaśāstras* were used by native intellectuals to articulate different world views, even ones which disagreed with each other. For example, the supporters of Rammohun, (Ramchandra Vidyavagis and Madanmohan Tarkalankar) as well as his critics (Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, Radhakanta Deb and Anantarama Vidyavagisaktr<sup>602</sup>) articulated their ideas from a framework which was informed and influenced by the *Dharmaśāstras*.<sup>603</sup> Thus the *Dharmaśāstras* were an important part of early-nineteenth century Bengali intellectual culture.

Hatcher has even coined the term, ‘shastric imaginary’, to refer to this intellectual context.

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<sup>599</sup> Hatcher, ‘Pandits at work’, 51-4.

<sup>600</sup> Hatcher, ‘Pandits at work’, 45-6.

<sup>601</sup> Hatcher, ‘Pandits at work’, 51-4.

<sup>602</sup> Anantaram Vidyavagisaktr was a *Dharmaśāstric* scholar in Calcutta. Anantarama’s defence of *Sati* was written as a tract in Sanskrit. The tract criticised Rammohun’s ‘half baked’ ideas of *Sati*. According to Duncan Derrett, the work was a ‘masterpiece’ of *Śāstric* scholarship. Source: J. Duncan M. Derrett, ‘Anantarama’s defence of *Sati* (c.1818-1820)’, in Bishnupada Bhattacharya (ed.) *Bulletin of the Department of Post-Graduate Training and Research, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 150th Anniversary Volume, 1824-1974* (Calcutta, 1979), 47.

<sup>603</sup> Hatcher, ‘Pandits at work’, 51-4.

Hatcher's ideas of a 'shastric imaginary' clearly show that it is not surprising that Rammohun articulated his ideas on governance by referring to the *Dharmaśāstras*. Hatcher also places Rammohun within the context of a 'shastric imaginary', and notes that he made 'extensive and sophisticated use of the Sanskrit intellectual tradition while at the same time applying colonial technologies (the printing press) and methods of debate (petitions in newspapers)'.<sup>604</sup>

In this context, this chapter will show that Rammohun referred to a number of *Dharmaśāstra* authors (Manu, Yagnavalkya, Vyasa, Katyayana, Narada, Vishnu, Vrihaspati Vyasa, Gautama, Apastamba and Baudhayana) to critique contemporary social practices (such as polygamy) and published his writings in English and Bengali tracts. This chapter focuses on his interpretations of the *Dharmaśāstras* in writings on property law. The focus on *property* law is also a point of continuity from the *Tuhfat*. As the previous chapter showed, Rammohun conceptualised a stable society as that which had defined property laws. The idea of property was hence core to his concept of social stability and the prevention of conflict.

Rammohun's references to the *Dharmaśāstras* appear in a large number of works on Hindu scripture and *Sati*. The fact that Rammohun referred to the *Dharmaśāstras* over such a broad range of concerns however requires further explanation. We thus briefly examine the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition in its own context in order to get a clearer perspective of his ideas.

The *Dharmaśāstras* (or *Śāstras*) are Early-Indian texts which were written during the period of the Mauryan Empire (322-185 B.C.E.) and Gupta Empire (320-550 C.E.) as

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<sup>604</sup> Hatcher, 'Pandits at work', 54-9.

manuals of administration.<sup>605</sup> The *Dharmaśāstras* were concerned with the role and administrative functions of the king, the state and the judiciary (collectively termed *artha*).<sup>606</sup> This can be seen from Patrick Olivelle's study of the authors of the *Dharmaśāstras*. He shows that Apastamba devoted 5.8 % of his text to *artha*; Baudhayana, 2.9 %; Vasistha, 9 %; Gautama, 16.1 % and Manu, 20.5 %.

Since Rammohun consistently referred to Manu more than any other *Dharmaśāstra* author, we briefly examine Manu's importance. According to Olivelle, Manu is the (mythical) author of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, the most important text of the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition and 'a watershed moment in the development of the *Dharmaśāstra*'.<sup>607</sup> The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*'s importance lies in the overwhelming importance given to governance in the text- the king, state and judicial procedure (9.3. % of the text is on judicial procedure alone).<sup>608</sup>

Although the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* emphasised the point more than any other text, we note that all *Dharmaśāstras* were concerned with the question of correct governance. In this context, Olivelle argues that the *Śāstras* took a broad view of the scope of the term, 'governance'. He points out that governance in the *Śāstras* did not only refer to state regulations and rules but also to a policy of integrating rituals, social practices, customs, practices, conventional rules and moral precepts within a framework of administration- judicial and civil.<sup>609</sup> Olivelle argues that this broad

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<sup>605</sup> Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', 180.

<sup>606</sup> Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', 185.

<sup>607</sup> Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', 185.

<sup>608</sup> Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', 185.

<sup>609</sup> Olivelle, 'Explorations in Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*', 185.



definition of governance led to a distinct political theory. This can be best seen in the *Śāstric* theory of government which we shall examine further below.

The *Dharmaśāstric* theory of government has been worked in considerable detail by B.D. Chattopadhyay. Chattopadhyay argued that the *Śāstras* did not advocate a system of government which was centralised or decentralised. Rather, *Śāstric* administration was based on the allocation political power by large administrations to local communities.<sup>610</sup>

According to Chattopadhyaya, the *Dharmaśāstras* advocated a devolution of political power to local authorities to the extent that the 'administrative machinery of the state' did not intervene in local governments on a day to day basis, but only in times of conflict. This was not because the state did not have adequate resources at its disposal, but because local autonomy was 'structured' into the state administration as 'autonomous spaces'.<sup>611</sup> The existence of 'autonomous spaces' in Early-Indian administrations resulted in an emphasis on local governance. Hence the Early-Indian state was responsible for the creation of peaceful, stable, 'autonomous spaces'. In theory at least, this advocated a high degree of accountability of the central administration to local communities. However, as Chattopadhyay noted, the *Dharmaśāstras* did not specify the details of how this was to be done or suggest how *subjects* could hold a state administration accountable. Its key importance lay in its emphasis on local government, and its stress on the devolution of political power.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India* (Delhi, 2003), 110.

<sup>611</sup> Chattopadhyaya, *Early India*, 110.

<sup>612</sup> Chattopadhyaya, *Early India*, 112.

In this context, we note that Rammohun criticised the Company for concentrating its political power in the distant city of London. He argued that this had led to the emergence of the East India Company as an 'arbitrary authority' in Bengal.<sup>613</sup> By this he meant that the Company was headquartered at London, governed the natives of India but was accountable to neither.

'[The] present Rulers have brought with them purer principles from the land of their birth which may better withstand the influence of long residence amid numerous temptations to which they are exposed [but] on the other hand from the seat of the Supreme government being placed at an immense distance and the channel of communication being left entirely in their own hands, they [the Company officials] are left more at liberty to follow their own interests [...] and they may care little for the character they leave behind them in a remote country, among a people for whose opinion they have no regard.'<sup>614</sup>

Rammohun's reference to 'purer principles' from Britain also indicated an acquaintance with political ideas which Company men were familiar with. However, Rammohun's assessment that the 'purer principles' did not work in the Indian political context also showed the limitation of these ideas. It was in this context that he advocated a *Śāstric* theory of state and it was precisely because Company officials were not familiar with an *Śāstric* idea of state and government that Rammohun referred to familiar terms (such as constitutional liberalism, for example) to better explain his ideas.

Rammohun's (Calcutta) writings also argued that the local community, Bengali society, could hold the Company accountable for its administration far more effectively than

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<sup>613</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose (Calcutta, 1983), 394.

<sup>614</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose, 465.

distant overseers at London (such as the Board of Control and the Court of Directors). In his explanation of ideas of government and *what constitutes good government*, Bengali society was as important to Rammohun as was the Company. Rammohun explained his ideas to contemporary Bengali society using *Purāṇic* motifs (such as the mythical hero Parasurama). I argue that Rammohun's reference to the *Purāṇas* also enables us to locate a deeper, embedded *Śāstric* theory of government located within the myths.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one focuses on the ways in which Rammohun made his ideas accessible to contemporary Bengali society and Company officials and section two explains Rammohun's theory of state as an interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras*.

### **Section one: Rammohun's ideas of accountable governance: The role of the Bengali public and the Company**

The role of the Bengali public and the Company in Rammohun's political thought can be most clearly seen in his first tract on property law, *Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females* (1822) (Henceforth, *Brief Remarks*). The tract was addressed to contemporary Bengali society. Rammohun strongly urged the natives to hold Company accountable for their (mis)interpretations of the current property law, *Dāyabhāga*.

The *Dāyabhāga* is a legal text, composed in prose and attributed to the medieval jurist, Jimutavahana.<sup>615</sup> According to Ludo Rocher, the Company interpreted *Dāyabhāga* as

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<sup>615</sup> Ludo Rocher, *Jimutavahana's Dāyabhāga: The Hindu Law of Inheritance in Bengal* (Oxford, 2012), 39.

the main legal text of Bengal but presented its author, Jimutavahana, as a mythic figure.<sup>616</sup> Rocher argued that the Company's perspective introduced an element of ambiguity into the text.

Rammohun however interpreted Jimutavahana as a historical character.<sup>617</sup> He argued that Jimutavahana was part of a long chain of *Śāstric* scholars who interpreted the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*.<sup>618</sup> In his view, the *Dāyabhāga* was a part of continuous legal tradition in India rather than a semi-mythic text which did not have any legal precedents. Rammohun's interpretation was thus a more rigorous reading of the text.

Rammohun argued that the current system of law making in Bengal misinterpreted the *Dāyabhāga* with terrible consequences for the welfare the natives particularly women:

With a view to enable the [Bengali] public to form an idea of [...] the gradual degradation introduced [...] by arbitrary [political] authorities, I am induced to give as an instance, the interest and the care which our ancient legislators [*Manu, Yagnavalkya, Katyayana, Narada, Vishnu, Vrihaspati and Vyasa*] took in the promotion of the comfort of the female part of the community and to compare the laws of female inheritance which they enacted and which afforded that sex the opportunity of enjoyment of life which moderns and our contemporaries have gradually introduced and established to their complete privation, directly or indirectly, of most of these objects that make life agreeable.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Rocher, *Jimutavahana's Dāyabhāga*, 7.

<sup>617</sup> Rammohun's perspective was correct. Ludo Rocher's study of the *Dāyabhāga* has shown that Jimutavahana was indeed a historical character who lived 'no later than 1500 C.E.' Rocher, *Jimutavahana's Dāyabhāga*, 18.

<sup>618</sup> This was not fanciful conjecture on Rammohun's part. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* has always had a pre-eminent status amongst Indian legal texts. In this context Rocher shows that the *Dāyabhāga* is not only an interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras* but also refers to an even older legal textual tradition, the *Dharmasūtras* (600-300 B.C.E). Rocher, *Jimutavahana's Dāyabhāga*, 3-4.

<sup>619</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 375-6.

Rammohun's main criticism therefore was that the Company had completely ignored the *Śāstric* tradition. Although he did not specify the 'moderns' and 'contemporaries', Ludo Rocher's study of Jimutavahana's *Dāyabhāga* has given us an important clue. Rocher compiled a list of commentaries on the *Dāyabhāga* from 1475-1825 and observed that none but H.T. Colebrook had completely written out all *Dharmaśāstric* references.<sup>620</sup> Since Colebrook was the only Company official to have translated the *Dāyabhāga* to English, the official interpretation of the text in courts throughout Bengal also referred to his translation. Rammohun's comment on the 'moderns' was thus a reference to Colebrook.

This does not mean that Colebrook was not aware of the *Dharmaśāstras*. Indeed, as Nandini Bhattacharyya-Panda showed, Colebrook was of the opinion that the *Dharmaśāstras* were an important legal tradition. According to Bhattacharyya-Panda, Colebrook's interpretation of the *Śāstric* tradition however was deeply flawed. This is because Colebrook considered the *Dharmaśāstras* to be an Early-Indian relic, which did not have much influence on subsequent legal traditions in India. Thus, Colebrook did not feel the need to enquire into an *Śāstric* theory of state and government while interpreting the *Dāyabhāga*.<sup>621</sup>

Bhattacharya-Panda argued that the Company applied Colebrooke's logic to the entire system of Hindu law in Bengal with the consequence that their interpretation of 'Hindu

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<sup>620</sup> Rocher, *Jimutavahana's Dāyabhāga*, 17-36.

<sup>621</sup> Nandini Bhattacharyya-Panda, *Appropriation and Invention of Tradition: The East India Company and Hindu Law in Early Colonial Bengal* (Oxford, 2008), 252-3.

law' became 'a British administrative invention' than a reflection of Indian legal practices.<sup>622</sup>

As section two will further elaborate, Rammohun posed an alternative interpretation of *Śāstric* law based on readings of the *Dharmaśāstras*. Here we focus on Rammohun's criticisms of the Company's current ideas of the *Dāyabhāga* in *Brief Remarks*.

Rammohun argued that the Company's ignorance of the *Dharmaśāstras* was due to its lack of engagement with an informed Bengali public ('the great body of the learned Hindus').<sup>623</sup> Rammohun argued:

Should a widow or daughter wish to secure her right of maintenance [inheritance] by having recourse to the law, the learned Brahmins whether holding public situations in courts or not, generally divide into two parties, one advocating the cause of those females and the other that of their adversaries. [...] In general, however, a consideration of the difficulties attending a law suit which a native woman, particularly a widow, is hardly capable of surmounting, induces her to forgo her right [...]<sup>624</sup>

Rammohun's use of the term 'Brahmin' referred to unchecked Brahminical power and its deeply negative implications for social welfare of Bengali society. For example, in the same tract Rammohun interpreted polygamy as a case of unaccountable Brahminical legislative authority in the interpretation of property law. He noted:

Polygamy [is] a frequent source of the greatest misery in native families; a grand object of Hindus being to secure a provision for their male offspring. The law, which relieves them from the necessity of giving an equal portion to their wives, removes a principal restraint on the

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<sup>622</sup> Bhattacharyya-Panda, *Appropriation and Invention of Tradition*, 243.

<sup>623</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 384.

<sup>624</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 383.

indulgence of their inclination in respect to the number they marry. Some of them especially Brahmans of higher birth, marry ten, twenty or thirty women, either for some small consideration or merely to gratify their brutal inclinations, leaving a great many of them both during their lifetime and after their death, at the mercy of their paternal relations. The evil consequences arising from such polygamy, the public may easily guess, from the nature of the fact itself, without my being reduced to the mortification of particularising those which are known by the native public to be of daily occurrence.<sup>625</sup>

Rammohun's point about the public being 'aware' of the problems of polygamy caused by Brahminical interpretation was an indirect reference to those who were not 'aware' of its consequences on Bengali society- Company officials. Thus the above passage can also be read as an attempt to begin a dialogue between Company officials and Bengali society. Rammohun argued that polygamy was not a private social concern but a case of misgovernance.<sup>626</sup> This can be seen in his argument that:

Had a Magistrate or any other public officer been authorised by the rulers of the empire to receive applications for the sanction of a second marriage during the life of a first wife and to grant his consent [according to *Śāstric* law] the distress of the female sex in Bengal and the number of suicides would have necessarily been much reduced.<sup>627</sup>

Rammohun argued that in the case of polygamy, the Company was not aware that polygamy was highly regulated by *Śāstric* texts such as *Manu* and *Yagnavalkya* because

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<sup>625</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 379.

<sup>626</sup> Rammohun cited official statistics to substantiate his point and show that he was not exaggerating his position, 'It cannot pass unnoticed to those who are unacquainted with the state of society in India that the number of female suicides in single province of Bengal when compared with those of any other British provinces, is almost ten to one: we may safely attribute this disproportion chiefly to the greater frequency of a plurality of wives in Bengal and of their total neglect in providing for the maintenance of their females'. *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 379.

<sup>627</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 380.

it received its orders from officials from London who did not take the views of its subjects on the matter.<sup>628</sup> This can be seen from his argument that:

Both common sense and the law of the land designate the practice [of polygamy] as the sale of females. The humane and liberal among the Hindus lament its existence as well as the annihilation of female rights in respect of inheritance introduced by modern expounders. They however trust that the humane attention of Government will be directed to those evils which are the chief source of misery [...] among women.<sup>629</sup>

Pointers such as 'humane and liberal Hindus' were signposts to Company officials to engage with a politically conscious and educated public in Bengal. Engaging the public also referred to passing laws which reflected social welfare. Rammohun emphasised this argument by citing the example of Madhab Singh, the late Raja of Tirhoot to regulate polygamy. As he argued:

The horror of this practice is so painful to the natural feelings of man that even Madhab Singh, the late Raja of Tirhoot (although a Brahman himself) through compassion took upon himself (I am told) within the *last half century* to limit Brahmins on his estate to four wives only.<sup>630</sup>  
(Emphasis mine)

The Raja had thus introduced the regulations in response to the 'painful' experiences of his subjects. Significantly, the regulation had been in force for nearly fifty years. Rammohun's emphasis on the time period emphasised his concern with the slow rate of change in Company policy. This can be seen from his argument that:

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<sup>628</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 380.

<sup>629</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 383.

<sup>630</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 379.



In the year 1793 there were among European gentlemen so very few acquainted with Sanskrit and Hindu law that it would have been hardly possible to have formed a committee of European oriental scholars and learned Brahmans capable of deciding on points of Hindu law. It was therefore highly judicious in government to appoint *Pandits* in the different *Zillah* courts of Appeal, to facilitate the proceedings of Judges in such subjects. But as we can now fortunately find European gentlemen capable of investigating legal questions with but little assistance from the natives, how happy would it be for the Hindu community, both male and female were they to enjoy benefits of the opinion of such gentlemen when disputes arise, particularly on matters of inheritance.<sup>631</sup>

As the first chapter showed, the *Exposition* identified 1793 as the beginning of a new phase in Company administration in India with the Permanent Settlement. By this reckoning Rammohun assumed that by 1822, the Company was in better a position to assess the welfare of their subjects.

Rammohun's ideas on unchecked Brahminical legislative authority may have found an agreeable readership amongst the Judges. William Jones for example had been a harsh critic of the role of Sanskrit *Pandits* in interpreting *Śāstric* law and even written to the Governor General Lord Cornwallis in 1788 that, 'I could not with an easy conscience concur in a decision merely on the written opinion of the native lawyers in any case in which they would have the remotest interest in misleading the Court'.<sup>632</sup> In 1794, Jones attempted to break the Pandit monopoly on the *Śāstras* by producing the first

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<sup>631</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 384.

<sup>632</sup> Quoted in Ludo Rocher, 'Hindu Law of Succession: From Shastras to Modern Law' in Donald R. Davis (ed.) *Studies in Hindu Law and Dharmaśāstra*, (New York, 2012), 184.

the English translation of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*. In 1798, Colebrook pronounced a similar intention while translating the *Dāyabhāga* to English.<sup>633</sup>

These efforts were not unacknowledged in Rammohun's writings. *Brief Remarks* even ended with a glowing reference to the Company's 'honest judgement' on Hindu law.<sup>634</sup>

As Rammohun noted:

Lest anyone should infer from what I have stated that I mean to impeach universally the character of the great body of learned Hindus I declare positively, that is far from my intention. I only maintain that the native community place greater confidence in the honest judgement of European countrymen than that of their own countrymen. But should the natives receive the same advantages of education that the Europeans generally enjoy and be brought up in the same notions of honour they will I trust be found equally with Europeans worthy of trust and confidence of their countrymen and the respect of all men.<sup>635</sup>

The above passage seems contradictory to his criticism of the Company's interpretation of the *Dāyabhāga*. Firstly, Rammohun appeared to be an *uncritical* supporter of Company translations of the *Śāstras*. Secondly, the Bengali public were not given much importance.

A closer reading of the passage however suggests that this was not the case. Firstly, Rammohun began with an assertion that the Bengali public was an informed and educated readership. Secondly, he argued that the Company should invest in the education of its subjects and thereby the creation of a larger body of politically conscious subjects. He strongly implied that the Company neglected this task currently.

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<sup>633</sup> Rocher, 'Hindu Law of Succession: From Shastras to Modern Law', 185.

<sup>634</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 387.

<sup>635</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 384.

Thirdly, by requesting the 'native community to place greater confidence' in the Company than their 'own countrymen', Rammohun reiterated his basic argument that the Company was not only accountable to 'native interpreters of law' but all its subjects. Thus, we can conclude that the above passage explained Rammohun's arguments on the importance of governmental accountability to the public and suggested a wider participation in governance by Bengali society. This shows that the scope of *Brief Remarks* was wider than a critique of current property law.

Implicit in Rammohun's references to the public ('great body of learned Hindus') is that he conceptualised Bengali society as an *ethical* society. The 'native community' would not be able to place 'greater confidence' on the 'honest judgement' of Company officials unless there were strong ethical reasons to do so. Thus we find that Rammohun's ideas of everyday ethical practice in Bengali society went hand in hand with his concept of accountability.

In this context, I argue that *Brief Remarks* was a template for Rammohun's political thought. Rammohun explained his ideas in a lengthy narrative-footnote in the tract addressed to Company officials and Bengali society. To the Company-men, Rammohun argued that public support to governments was crucial to the legal process. To Bengali society, Rammohun stressed that good governance only occurred when the public forced governments to be accountable for their laws, while a laxity on public accountability led to bad governance.

Rammohun adopted a *Purāṇic* narrative structure in the footnote.<sup>636</sup> The *Purāṇas* (tales of ancient days) are a genre of Sanskrit and vernacular literature mainly concerned with cosmogony, destruction and renovation of mythical worlds, the genealogy of gods, and reigns of princes. Perhaps no other textual tradition in Indian literature at the time could rival the *Purāṇas* for their popularity in Bengali society.<sup>637</sup>

One reason for this was their sheer size. The *Purāṇas* are so voluminous that all scholarly efforts to assess the extent of the *Purāṇic* tradition have failed so far. An example of this is Haraprasad Shastri's calculation of the total number of *Purāṇas* and Ludo Rocher's assessment of Shastri's position. Shastri opined that the full compilation of the *Purāṇas* was, '18 *Maha-Purāṇas* consisting of 400,000 verses, 18 *Upa-Purāṇas*, 18 more *Purāṇas* which were not a part of *Maha* or *Upa-Purāṇas* and miscellaneous *Purāṇas*. This brought the total to about 100 *Purāṇas*.' He calculated that the total number of verses would be 2 million and estimated that publishing all 100 *Purāṇas* 'would fill 500 volumes'. Rocher however noted from his study of the *Purāṇas* that Shastri had 'vastly *underestimated*' the full extent of *Purāṇic* literature. He was however unable to provide a precise figure apart from the definite conclusion that the *Purāṇas* were undoubtedly the most voluminous of all Sanskrit literature in any genre.<sup>638</sup>

Rammohun adopted a *Purāṇic* narrative structure to circulate his ideas as broadly as possible in contemporary Bengali society rather than a restricted native elite.<sup>639</sup> In fact,

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<sup>636</sup> Velchuru Narayan Rao, 'Purāṇa as Brahminic Ideology' in Wendy Doniger (ed.), *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina texts* (Delhi, 1993), 87.

<sup>637</sup> Ludo Rocher, *Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 2-3.

<sup>638</sup> Ludo Rocher, *Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 2-3.

<sup>639</sup> Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 9.

native intellectuals in the early-nineteenth century looked down on the *Purāṇas*. For example, Debendranath Tagore appealed to his followers to ‘turn away’ from the *Purāṇas* and focus on the *Upaniṣads* and *Vedas*. Similarly, Soshee Chunder Dutt, an influential Bengal writer, assessed the *Purāṇas* as ‘woven out of a system of mythology, which has perhaps nowhere been surpassed in extent, richness or obscenity’.

Rammohun’s Bengali writings such as the *Vedāntasara* (1815) also employed the *Purāṇas* to explain his ideas in contemporary Bengali society.<sup>640</sup> This created quite a stir amongst his critics since the *Vedānta* argued for one God while the *Purāṇas* were concerned with a multiplicity of gods and goddesses. In response, Rammohun argued that the *Purāṇas* were not ‘idolatrous’ texts but carriers of complex ideas:

The *Purāṇas* [...] not only contain directions for idolatrous worship [but] also state an imaginary representation of God. Such statements [...] make it certain that the preceding descriptions [of idolatry] are given only for matters which are extremely difficult for the intellect to grasp.<sup>641</sup>

This strategy was employed again in *Reply to Utsavānanda* (*Utsavānader sahit vicār*) where Rammohun explained the *Vedānta* by quoting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.<sup>642</sup> Again in 1818, Rammohun defended his use of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to explain the *Vedānta Sūtra*. As he argued:

The *Vedānta Sūtras* are very difficult. When the venerable Vyasa had composed the *Purāṇas* [...] he was still not satisfied [and] so he composed, the chief of all *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata*

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<sup>640</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 10.

<sup>641</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 10.

<sup>642</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 21.

*Purāṇa* as a commentary of the *Vedānta Sūtra* [...]. This is [what is] stated in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*.<sup>643</sup>

We note that Rammohun located not just the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* but the entire *Purāṇic* textual tradition within the corpus of *Vedic* scholarship presenting them as simple explanatory texts:

The *Purāṇas* are respected because they present the meaning of the *Veda* and various moral teachings under the guise of stories. But they are not themselves the *Veda*.<sup>644</sup>

We note that *Reply to Utsavananda* and *Reply to Goswamin* (*Gosvāmīr sahit vicār*) were Bengali tracts which were never translated into English.<sup>645</sup> The use of the *Purāṇas* as explanatory texts for the Bengali public thus has a precedence in Rammohun's writings.

Its popular and mythological content notwithstanding, the *Purāṇas* were not unknown in official circles. The Company had undertaken translations of the *Purāṇas* since 1784. In the 1830's Vans Kennedy and H.H. Wilson debated the *Purāṇas* in Calcutta periodicals. This shows an official familiarity with the popularity of the *Purāṇas*.

Wilson argued that this had a lot to do with the stylistics of the *Purāṇas*:

The style of the *Purāṇas* is simple and easy and the narrative is plainly and unpretendingly told.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 35.

<sup>644</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 33.

<sup>645</sup> Killingley, *Only True God*, 3.

<sup>646</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, lxxii.

Thus, neither of his audiences- Bengali society or Company officials would have been alienated when Rammohun's presented his footnote- narrative in *Brief Remarks* within a *Purāṇic* narrative.

A *Purāṇic* narrative also allowed for significant flexibility.<sup>647</sup> As V Narayan Rao noted, *Purāṇic* myths were not concerned with the historicity of their narratives but rather their purpose was to promote 'a new world view'.<sup>648</sup> 'The *Purāṇas* don't just alter facts', Narayan argued, 'but perceive them in a new way [such that] the very concepts of time and space in Indian history are changed through *Purāṇic* narration'.<sup>649</sup> The *Purāṇic* narrative was thus the ideal vehicle of communicating his ideas to a diverse audience.

One particular idea in the footnote which Rammohun's readers would have found intriguing was his understanding of the caste system. The traditional caste system was a rigid social hierarchy comprised of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Rammohun referred to the Brahmins and Kshatriyas throughout his narrative *without however mentioning them by their caste names or even indicating a social hierarchy*. For example, he insisted on referring to the Kshatriyas (or the ruling caste) as the 'second tribe' without giving any indication of who the 'first tribe' might be.<sup>650</sup> Instead, Rammohun referred to a 'first class' (and avoided any reference to a second

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<sup>647</sup> Velchuru Narayan Rao, '*Purāṇa* as *Brahminic* Ideology', 93.

<sup>648</sup> Velchuru Narayan Rao, '*Purāṇa* as *Brahminic* Ideology', 94.

<sup>649</sup> Velchuru Narayan Rao, '*Purāṇa* as *Brahminic* Ideology', 94.

<sup>650</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

class). These arbitrary changes show that Rammohun was deliberately moving away from a ritualistic definition of caste to a sociological one.<sup>651</sup>

Rammohun's footnote took the shape of a narrative of political institutions in Early and Medieval India. The narrative did not however begin with chronological, geographical or textual references. We note that this was not in keeping with his style of writing. As chapter one showed, the *Exposition* provided chronological and geographical details, textual references in its narrative of history. In *Brief Remarks* on the other hand, Rammohun began with an abrupt declaration that the Kshatriya caste though 'appointed to defend and rule', failed to perform their duties effectively:

The second tribe [Kshatriya caste] having adopted arbitrary and despotic practices, the *others* revolted against them and under the personal command of the celebrated Parasurama, defeated the Royalists in several battles and put cruelly to death almost all the males of that tribe.<sup>652</sup> (Emphasis mine)

Rather than a historical context, the reader was immediately directed to the mythical *Purāṇic* hero Parasurama. That Parasurama was not given any introduction is indicative of Rammohun's confidence that his readership was familiar with the character.

Company officials were also familiar with the character. We note that Parasurama appears in the text of H.H. Wilson's translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, a project in which Rammohun was involved in at the time of writing *Brief Remarks*.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> It does not appear from the following discussion that Rammohun considered caste to be of much importance in his political thought, unless it was to criticise the abuses of the current caste system such as Brahminical power (specifically, *Kulin* polygamy).

<sup>652</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

<sup>653</sup> Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 2-3.



Interestingly, the original text of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* did not have any reference to Parasurama. Instead Wilson had included it because ‘the legend makes a great figure *Vaishnava* works in general’.<sup>654</sup> This shows that Parasurama was a popular mythological hero in early-nineteenth century Bengali society.

Rammohun’s assumption that his readership were familiar with the myth meant that he did not give an account of it. In this context, we note that Wilson recounted the most popular version of it in contemporary Bengal his translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. In the absence of direct evidence from Rammohun himself, we have taken Wilson’s account as our text.<sup>655</sup> As noted above, Rammohun was also involved in Wilson’s translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

Apart from Parasurama, the myth also concerned two other main characters (Parasurama’s father and mother, Jamadagnya and Renuka) and two secondary characters (his grandfather, Prasenjit and a prince, Chitrahara). As Wilson recounted:

Jamadagnya [the father of Parasurama] was a pious sage [...]. Having gone to the King Prasenjit, he demanded in marriage his daughter Renuka, and the King gave her unto him. [Jamadagnya] conducted the princess to his hermitage and dwelt her there and she was contented to partake in his ascetic life. They had four sons. [...] Once when they were all absent, Renuka [...] went forth to bathe. On her way to the stream she beheld Chitrahara, the prince [...] in the water. Defiled by unworthy thoughts [...] she returned to the hermitage and her husband perceived her agitation. Jamadagnya reproved her and commanded his four sons to put her to death. [Only Parasurama however was able to do the deed]. Parasurama

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<sup>654</sup> H.H. Wilson, *Vishnu Purana* (Calcutta, 1961), 320.

<sup>655</sup> Parasurama is not a peripheral mythical character but appears in the *Bhagvada Purāṇa*, *Agni Purāṇa* and *Padma Purana*. The most extensive treatment of the myth is in the oldest of the genre, *Vāyu Purāṇa* (350 B.C.-500 A.D). Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, 321.

accordingly took up his axe and struck of her head whereupon the wrath of the mighty Jamadagnya was assuaged. [...] Then Parasurama begged his father the restoration of his mother to life, with the forgetfulness of her being slain [...]<sup>656</sup>

Although Parasurama has been perceived as a matricide in Bayly's interpretation of Rammohun's narrative, what strikes the reader almost immediately is that the beheading of his mother was not ultimately fatal. According to Wendy Doniger, this is not unusual but in keeping with the general literary tradition of mythological beheadings.<sup>657</sup> Doniger argues that the point of the myth is not the beheading but to illustrate that 'Parasurama is torn between two warring parents. In the end, all wrongs are righted'.<sup>658</sup> One concludes that Parasurama is a violent but conscientious hero.

The story of Parasurama did not however end there. Wilson's translation of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also recounted that in a tragic turn of events, Parasurama's father, Jamadagnya was murdered by the sons of a Kshatriya prince, Kartavirya. Jamadagnya was not killed due to any specific reason but was rather the victim of the arrogance of the ruling elite. This sentiment can be seen in Parasurama's declaration that:

'How great is the crime that they have committed in slaying an old man like you, wholly preoccupied with pious cares and engaging not in strife! Much have they to boast of to their fellows and friends that they have shamelessly slain a solitary hermit incapable of contending in arms?'<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, 320.

<sup>657</sup> Wendy Doniger, "Put a Bag over Her Head': Beheading Mythological Women' in Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (eds.) *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion and Culture*, (London, 1995), 16.

<sup>658</sup> Doniger, 'Put a Bag over Her Head', 16.

<sup>659</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, 322.

Wilson shows that this declaration became the precursor to a war between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas in which Parasurama emerged the victor:

[Parasurama] then made a vow that he would expatriate the whole of the Kshatriya race.

Thrice of seven times did he clear the earth of the Kshatriya caste.<sup>660</sup>

Wilson recounted that Parasurama was congratulated by the ghost of his father, Jamadagnya, after his victory. Bizzarely, the ghost of Jamadagnya even appointed various Brahmins as kings in the place of earlier rulers.<sup>661</sup> Thus the after-math of Parasurama's bloody revenge witnessed an overhaul of the current political system in which the Brahmin caste was now given political power. This is similar to Rammohun's narrative where Parasurama's actions are seen as were a response to the deliberate misjudgement of the Kshatriyas.

Rammohun however also differed from the standard myth by not presenting Parasurama's revolt as a war between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Rather, he asserted that Parasurama led a *societal* revolt against political authority. Rammohun also went beyond the myth by not only citing the transfer of power after Parasurama's victory but also outlining his ideas of *what* counted as good government:

It was at last resolved [after Parasurama's victory] that the legislative authority should be confined to the first class who could have no share in the government of the state, or in managing the revenue of the country under any pretence; while the second tribe should exercise the executive authority. The consequence was that India enjoyed peace and harmony for a great many centuries.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, 322.

<sup>661</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, 322.

<sup>662</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

The point of ‘legislators’ was to demonstrate the ways in which impartial lawmakers could be made accountable to the public. Thus, the ‘first class’ (which the narrative later revealed as the Brahmins) represented societal interests, instituted new laws against unethical social practices:

The Brahmans [had] no expectation of holding office or partaking of any kind of political promotion [...] Freely associating with all other tribes [castes] they were able to know their sentiments and to appreciate the justness of their complaints and thereby lay down such rules as were required *which often induced them to rectify the abuses that were practised by the second tribe.* (Emphasis mine)<sup>663</sup>

Thus Rammohun argued that the new system of governance was an accountable government formed by common consent. This implied that an active and politically conscious society played a leading role in the transformation of law-making into a process of reform and governmental accountability to the ruled.

Rammohun’s references to ‘legislature’ of the Brahmins has been cited as evidence of a constitutional liberal programme by C.A. Bayly who argued that Rammohun constructed a popular history of a constitution for Indian society in order to legitimise his project.<sup>664</sup> I argue that Bayly’s interpretation is not an example of Rammohun’s constitutional liberalism but an instance of how his ideas could be internalised and found acceptable by a diverse readership.

The question that arises is that is Rammohun was not a constitutional liberal, then what was the source of his ideas of a Brahmin and Kshatriya rule? The answer to this

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<sup>663</sup> English works of Rammohun Roy, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

<sup>664</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 52.

may lie in the *Purāṇic* myths themselves. As we shall see below, the *Purāṇas* were also sources of political theory and government, explained through the medium of popular stories. Let us take the case of a *Purāṇa* which Rammohun, Company officials and contemporary Bengali society would have been familiar with- the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* referred to a wide array of myths, but our concern here is the marriage myth of the celestial gods *Mitra* and *Varuna* which produced Agastya, a *Purāṇic* (Brahmin) hero. According to A.K. Coomaraswamy, this myth encapsulates a deeper political theory of government.<sup>665</sup> Coomaraswamy argued that Early-Indian texts such as the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Ṛg Veda* referred to *Mitra* as the Sacerdotium (*brahma*) and *Varuna* as the Regnum (*kshatra*).<sup>666</sup>

Coomaraswamy argued that the Early-Indian conception of King and Brahmin was that of 'power and counsel'.<sup>667</sup> The relation between the two was unequal since the Brahmin's status as a 'spiritual authority' meant that his legitimacy was derived from a 'higher power' or scripture.<sup>668</sup> In this sense, the King was 'ruled' by a higher King and therefore subject also to the *laws* beholden by the 'higher King'. The *Śatapatha-*

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<sup>665</sup> A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven, 1942). (Henceforth, *Spiritual Authority*). Coomaraswamy's ideas on Indian political thought and Kingship were accepted by contemporary scholars such as Lee Bowen and E.J. Thomas. Both considered *Spiritual Authority* to be a pioneering work in political theory. Lee Bowen, 'Review', *Speculum* 17 (1942), 418-20; E.J. Thomas, 'Review' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 11 (1944), 438-9.

Historical works from the 1950's till the 70's did not however respond or critique the arguments of *Spiritual Authority*. This had a dismal effect on the visibility of the text in historical scholarship. By the 1980's, scholars of Early-Indian Kingship such as J.C. Heesterman 'did not know' of *Spiritual Authority*. Thomas R. Trautmann, 'Review', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23(1981), 514-516. Also, as William Jackson noted in 1988, Heesterman's passing over of *Spiritual Authority* can be seen as an example of a new school of historical scholarship with different methodologies and concerns. These included scholars such as Ronald Inden, Romila Thapar and Arjun Appadurai. William Jackson, 'Review', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 23 (1988), 230-4.

<sup>666</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 2.

<sup>667</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 6-7.

<sup>668</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 50.

*Brāhmaṇa* even gendered the role of the King and the Brahmin as feminine and masculine respectively.<sup>669</sup> Since masculinity is typically seen as a function of absolute power and violence, the King's femininity is an attempt to subvert his potential to be a violent overlord.

We note that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s reference to the *marriage* between *Mitra* and *Varuna* is also literally true. Coomaraswamy shows that the working relationship between the King and the Brahmin in the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* is explained in the same terms as a marriage. The *Purāṇic* result of this union in the form of Agastya is a very lucid reference to the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*'s interpretation of a successful King as one who embarked on a passage into 'Brahman-hood' to attain a inner peace and tranquillity than rule for political dominance.<sup>670</sup> Coomaraswamy concluded that Early-Indian texts referred to a form of state which was very different from a constitutional monarchy or a republican parliament.<sup>671</sup>

Coomaraswamy's interpretation of Early-Indian theory of government as an unequal alliance between the Brahmin and the King explains Rammohun's insistence on a Brahminical community which represented the interests of the subjects. As we observed earlier, Rammohun repeatedly returned to the theme of impartial Brahmin legislators as the ideal form of government. For 'two thousand years', he noted, the system of impartial Brahmin legislators had contributed to political stability. The system only collapsed when the Brahmins ('the first class') took employment under the new rulers ('Rajputs'). Rammohun argued that:

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<sup>669</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 3.

<sup>670</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 84-7.

<sup>671</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, 16.

The first class [Brahmins] having been induced to accept employments in the political department became entirely dependent on the second tribe [Kshatriya] and so unimportant in themselves that they were obliged to explain away the laws enacted by their [Brahmin] forefathers and to institute new rules according to the dictates of their contemporary princes. They were considered as merely nominal legislators and the whole power, whether legislative or executive was in fact exercised by the Rajputs.<sup>672</sup>

From our discussion of Coomaraswamy's theory, we see that 'Rajputs' were a representative example of those Kings who ruled without the independent counsel of their Brahmin advisors. The *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* warned that the result of a King without counsel was a tyrannical system of government. Similarly, Rammohun assessed 'Rajput' rule as a period of 'tyranny and oppression for a period of a thousand years' which unsurprisingly led to political instability in which India was ultimately 'divided among petty princes'.

Smaller units of administration did not however necessarily mean better governments.<sup>673</sup> The 'petty princes' only continued with the system of tyrannical governments albeit on a smaller scale and were 'detested by their respective subjects'. This led to the recurrence of a social revolution in which a dissatisfied populace appointed new rulers from 'Ghazni and Ghor'.<sup>674</sup> It did not however secure an accountable and stable government since the new rulers continued with a 'tyrannical system of government'.<sup>675</sup> This marked the end of the narrative of political institutions.

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<sup>672</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

<sup>673</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

<sup>674</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

<sup>675</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 376.

Rammohun's narrative offers us vital clues about his political project. This can be seen from its structure. We note that the narrative returned to the theme of social revolution and misgovernance throughout. Secondly, it was not structured according to the conventional markers of 'stages', 'decline' or 'golden age'. Rather, the point is that revolution and misgovernance can occur in any period of history.

Rammohun's emphasis on violence, revolution and specific rulers is not without precedence. We note that since the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* referred to a similar context from Early- India till the 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E, Rammohun's readers amongst Company officials would have been familiar with this context.<sup>676</sup> As Wilson observed:

The *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, and other works forming the body of Sanskrit literature are named [in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*] and so is the *Mahābhārata*. Both the Buddhists and the Jains are adverted to [...] The Gupta Kings reigned in the seventh century [and] the historical record of the [*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*] mentions them [...] and [...] to the first incursions of the Muhammadans [Mahmud Ghazi and Ghor]. In describing the latter [post 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E.] dynasties [...] they are described as reigning altogether one thousand seven hundred and ninety six years. Why this duration was chosen does not appear.<sup>677</sup>

Rammohun's narrative too followed a similar framework. The vague references to Early- India and rulers such as Mohammed Ghor and Ghazni in medieval India appear without any attempt at historicisation. This means that Rammohun did not present his

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<sup>676</sup> The period of the Gupta Empire is also the historical context of the *Purāṇas*. The descriptions of violence in (in the *Vishnu Purana* for example) are the 'scars' of the 'pitched battle' that was being fought by Hindu rulers against Jain and Buddhist ideas of religion during this period. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil* (London, 1976), 206.

<sup>677</sup> Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, lix.



narrative as historical account. Similarly time periods of 'a thousand years' and 'two thousand years' are given without explanation.

This however leads to the question of whether the lack of historical context was deliberate. One way to answer it is to re-look at the structure of the narrative. I argue that from its emphasis on a recurring theme rather than historical context and causal explanations, Rammohun employed a *mythic* structure of narrative. As Wendy Doniger observed, 'myths are essentially stories which are united by themes that recur in the narrativity'.<sup>678</sup>

Rammohun's narrative, we note, is united by a single theme, that throughout Indian history, those governments which were unaccountable to their subjects ultimately succumbed to revolution. The lack of historical context was therefore deliberate. Its primary purpose was to explain this general argument using popular historical and mythical figures.

Rammohun's deviations from the standard *Purāṇic* myth and inclusion of new terms and concepts to explain his ideas would not have been unusual to his readers in Bengali society who were familiar with an even more flexible version of the *Purāṇic* narrative in the local vernacular (also known as folk *Purāṇas*).<sup>679</sup> A.K. Ramanujan's study on the subject showed that folk *Purāṇas* were 'reworked motifs from a *Purāṇic* pool' to 'domesticate', 'localise', 'incorporate' and 'contemporise' myths according to

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<sup>678</sup> Doniger, *Origins of Evil*, 4.

<sup>679</sup> Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 73.

the readership/audience.<sup>680</sup> As D.C. Sen showed, folk *Purāṇas* were extremely popular in Bengal in the early-nineteenth century.<sup>681</sup>

In the case of Rammohun's narrative, a folk *Purāṇic* flexibility allowed for a vast vocabulary of concepts and categories to enter the narrative such as British historical categories ('royalists') and liberal political concepts such as ('executive and legislative authority').

The term 'royalist' is a Cromwellian reference and 'constitution' is indicative of a Liberal vocabulary. These are also terms which company officials would have been familiar with. We note that the deployment of these terms within a popular mythological context highlights Rammohun's attempt to reach out to wide audience (Bengali society and Company officials) but with a common message: the consequences of an unaccountable government was social instability and violent political revolution.

Rammohun's argument was not restricted to a footnote in *Brief Remarks* but articulated, expounded and developed in '*Memorial to the Supreme Court*' (in Calcutta) and '*Appeal to the King-in-Council*' (in London). Both writings were published in 1823. We shall examine each in turn.

Rammohun wrote *Memorial* and the *Appeal* as petitions in favour of the freedom of the press in Bengal. The press was crucial to Rammohun's political project. Since 1818, his vernacular papers, the bi-lingual *Sambad Kaumadi* and the Persian *Mirāt al-Akhhbār*

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<sup>680</sup> A.K. Ramanujan, 'On Folk Mythologies and Folk *Purāṇas*' in Wendy Doniger (ed.) *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina texts* (Delhi, 1993), 120.

<sup>681</sup> Quoted in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 73.

had popularised his ideas in Bengali society. For example, the *Sambad Kaumadi* rejected excessive expenditure on rituals and instead pleaded that costs be diverted to philanthropic projects such as education.<sup>682</sup>

The *Kaumadi* also referred to Rammohun's other writings such as the reform of property law.<sup>683</sup> As the next chapter will elaborate, the *Kaumadi* was also Rammohun's chief vehicle for articulating his ideas on social reform projects such as the practice of *Sati*.

But the *Kaumadi* was not only a vehicle of Rammohun's reformist ideas. As James Silk Buckingham the 'radical' proprietor of *Calcutta Journal* observed, the *Kaumadi* provided information on a wide number of subjects, 'religious, moral, domestic affairs, foreign communications and communications on various hitherto interesting local topics'.<sup>684</sup>

Buckingham's *Calcutta Journal* was however far too radical for the Company's taste. Alarmed at Buckingham's constant criticism of the government, the Governor-General, Lord Hastings proposed new regulations on the freedom of the press in 1823 but left India before they were approved by London.<sup>685</sup> His successor John Adam vigorously implemented the regulations by licensing all newspaper content and stipulated harsh fines of up to four hundred rupees for 'objectionable material' against the government.<sup>686</sup> That the regulations had a very harmful effect on vernacular

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<sup>682</sup> Smarajit Chakraborti, *The Bengali Press, 1818-1868: A Study in the Growth of Public Opinion* (Calcutta, 1976), 31.

<sup>683</sup> Chakraborti, *Bengali Press*, 32.

<sup>684</sup> Quoted in Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, 98.

<sup>685</sup> Chakraborti, *Bengali Press*, 31.

<sup>686</sup> Chakraborti, *Bengali Press*, 32.

newspapers in Bengal can be seen in the paucity of new publications in the years following the Regulation.<sup>687</sup>

Given this impact, it is unsurprising that the press regulations prompted appeals and petitions from the native community. Rammohun's appeals were amongst the many native petitions to the government at Calcutta and London to rescind the regulations. His appeals also articulated his political thought by stressing the importance of the press as a vehicle of governmental accountability. This argument had earlier been articulated in the prospectus of his Persian newspaper, *Mirāt al-Akhhbār*. As Rammohun noted:

In taking upon myself [Rammohun] to edit this paper my only object is that I may lay before the public such articles of Intelligence as may increase their experience and tend to their social improvement and that to the extent of my abilities I will communicate to the rulers a knowledge of the real situation of their subjects and make the subjects acquainted with the established laws and customs of their rulers: that the rulers may the more readily find an opportunity of granting relief to the people and the people may be put in possession of the means of obtaining protection and redress from their rulers.<sup>688</sup>

Rammohun thus presented the *Mirāt al-Akhhbār* as a means of criticising the misgovernance of the Company. Further, his repeated use of the term 'rulers' in the context of 'obtaining protection and redress' emphasised the absolute necessity of the government to be accountable to the natives. We note that the same argument had

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<sup>687</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, 106.

<sup>688</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India, A Selection from the Records, 1775-1845*, ed. Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (Calcutta, 1941), 299.

featured in the footnote-narrative of *Brief Remarks* (which appeared in the same year as the prospectus of *Mirāt al-Akhbār*).

The *Mirāt al-Akhbār*'s assessment of the current 'ruler' in the context of earlier governments also appeared in *Memorial* and *Appeal* in 1823. For example, *Memorial* spelt out Rammohun's ideas of history, accountability and government in clear terms. This can be seen from the following passage:

Your Memorialists are persuaded that the British Government is not disposed to adopt the political maxim so often acted upon by the Asiatic princes that the more a people are kept in darkness their rulers will deprive the greater advantages from them; since by reference to history it is found that this was but a short sighted policy. On the contrary it proved rather disadvantageous to them; for we find that as often as an ignorant people, when the opportunity offered, have revolted against their Rulers, all sorts of barbarous excesses and cruelties have been the consequence, whereas a people naturally disposed to peace and ease when placed under a good government from which they experience a just and liberal treatment, must become the more attached to it, in proportion as they become enlightened and the great body of the people are taught to appreciate the value of the blessings they enjoy under its rule.<sup>689</sup>

The above passage can also be read as a development of the footnote-narrative in *Brief Remarks*. First, the argument that unaccountable governments lead to social revolution was a clear reference to the *Brief Remarks*' references to social revolution and political stability. Second, the call for a 'reference to history' to indicated that Indian governments have been historically accountable to their subjects. Third, the

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<sup>689</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 442-3.

use of terms such as 'liberal' by a native to criticise a judicial body was an accusation of failure to implement the standards and the philosophy which was adopted in Britain.

The *Memorial's* point was further explored in *Appeal*. The *Appeal* first presented Britain as 'the successful defender of Europe from Continental usurpation' with a government invested in the welfare of its subjects.<sup>690</sup> Following this congratulatory tone however, Rammohun distanced himself from the European political context and stressed that his petition contained an assessment of Company rule in India:

We, your Majesty's faithful subjects, now come before you in painful circumstances, the local executive authorities having suddenly assumed the power of legislation in matters of the highest importance and abolished privileges of long standing without the least pretence of our ever having abused them and made an invasion into our civil rights such as is unprecedented in the history of British rule in Bengal by a measure of which either indicates a total disregard of the civil rights and privileges of your Majesty's faithful subjects or an intention to encourage a cruel and unfounded suspicion of our attachment to our existing Government.<sup>691</sup>

The term 'local government' can be read as a reference to the Company's political status in India as a representative of British political practices. The 'painful circumstances' which the 'local government' had introduced were then spelt out in detail. Rammohun accused the judiciary of bias towards the government. He argued that the Company's government was consequently unaccountable. This is because accountability of government depended on an *impartial* legislature. In this context, Rammohun warned that unaccountable governments triggered social revolution.

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<sup>690</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 445.

<sup>691</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 445.

While this argument has obvious similarities with *Brief Remarks*, Rammohun did not however refer to the *Purāṇas* which would have been virtually unknown in London but rather provided examples which his readers would have been more familiar with. Thus, Canada was highlighted as a representative example of his idea of the importance of accountable government:

Canada during the late war with America, afforded a memorable instance of the truth of this argument [of the consequences of governmental accountability to subjects]. The enlightened inhabitants of that colony finding their rights and privileges had been secured to them, their complaints listened to, and their grievances addressed by the British government resisted every attempt by the United States to seduce them from their allegiance to it. In fact, it can be fearlessly averred that the more enlightened people become, the less likely are they to revolt against the governing power as long as privilege exercised with justice is tempered with mercy, and the rights of the governed are recognised.<sup>692</sup>

But Rammohun did not only complain about the Supreme Court in the *Appeal*. The scope of his work was much broader. Rammohun assessed the political implications of Company rule in India—first, the Company had introduced unfamiliar institutions into Bengal; second, the Company’s policies in India reflected the shift in sovereign power from India to Britain; and third, the natives *expected* that the Company invest in the ‘welfare’ of its subjects. As Rammohun argued:

Having made Calcutta as the capital of their dominions, the English distinguished this city by such peculiar marks of favour as a free people would have been expected to bestow, in establishing an English court of Judicature and granting to all within its jurisdiction, the same civil rights as every Briton enjoys in his native country; thus putting the natives of India in

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<sup>692</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 459.

possession of such privileges as their forefathers never expected to attain, even under Hindu rulers. Considering these things and bearing in mind also the solicitude for the welfare of this country, uniformly expressed by the Honourable East India Company, under whose immediate control we are placed and also by the Supreme councils of the British nations, your dutiful subjects have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors but rather [...] as a protector.<sup>693</sup>

The *Appeal's* stress on native expectations of the Company was not a unique feature of the tract. This can also be seen in *Memorial* where Rammohun pointed out that government

accountability was an important subject of discussion amongst the natives:

The general subjects of observation and the constant and the familiar topic of discourse amongst the Hindu community of Bengal are the literary and political improvements which are continually going on in the state of the country under the present system of government and a comparison between their present auspicious prospects and their hopeless condition under their former rulers.<sup>694</sup>

Rammohun made two crucial arguments in *Memorial and Appeal*. First, he pledged the loyalty of native subjects to the British government at London rather than the Company. Second, he assessed the Company's presence in India in terms of previous Hindu governments, thus showing it to be an inheritor of previous political systems in India.

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<sup>693</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 446.

<sup>694</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 439.



The question that arises here is that if the Company *inherited* a previous political system, then what was it? As the next section will show, to Rammohun, this referred to a *Dharmaśāstric* a theory of state.

## **Section Two: A theory of state: Explaining the legality and legitimacy of the *Dharmaśāstras* to the Company**

Rammohun's interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras* as a theory of state can be seen in his second tract on property law, *Essay on the Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property* (Henceforth, *Ancestral Property*) published in 1830, eight years after *Brief Remarks*.

*Ancestral Property* was a sharp criticism of the Company's current policy of over-riding the tenets of the *Dāyabhāga* on wills and inheritance of property. Rammohun argued that while the *Dāyabhāga* had stipulated the right of the family patriarch to disinherit his heirs, the Company had begun to introduce changes in its interpretation of the *Dāyabhāga* creating much dissatisfaction in Bengali society.

The people are now struck with a mingled feeling of surprise and alarm, on being given to understand that the Supreme Law Authority in this country [...] is resolved to introduce new maxims into the law of inheritance hitherto in force in Bengal. [...] We are at a loss to reconcile the introduction of this arbitrary change in the law of inheritance with reason, or with regard for the future prosperity of this country: it appears inconsistent with the principles of justice; because a judge, although he is obliged to consult his own understanding, in interpreting the

law in many dubious cases submitted to his decision, yet is required to observe strict adherence to the established law where its language is clear.<sup>695</sup>

The passage shows that the Company's disregard for the *Dāyabhāga* was a recent phenomenon. Previously, the Company officials had 'adhered' to the *Dāyabhāga* even in the face of criticism:

Opinions have been advanced some time past in opposition to the rule laid down in the *Dāyabhāga*, authorising a father to make a sale or gift of ancestral property, without the consent of his sons and grandsons. But these adverse notions created little or no alarm; since, however individual opinions may run, the general principles followed by every Government are entirely at variance with the principle of groundlessly abrogating by arbitrary decision such civil laws of a conquered country as have been clearly and imperatively set forth in a most authoritative code, long adhered to by the natives and repeatedly confirmed, for upwards of half a century by judicial officers of the conquerors.<sup>696</sup>

While this appeared at first to be a highly specific criticism of property law, Rammohun's wording of the argument pointed to larger political concern. We note that Company was referred to as the 'government of a conquered country'. Its officials were 'judicial officers of the conquerors'. This indicated an uneasy political situation for the Company in Bengal and implied that the Company's recent decision to override the *Dāyabhāga* also undid its earlier efforts 'for upwards of half a century' to gain a measure of legitimacy by following a legal system which had the approval of its subjects.

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<sup>695</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 394.

<sup>696</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 394.

Rammohun argued that the new inheritance laws had begun to change the way that Bengali society perceived the political legitimacy of the Company. Thus the 'alarm' and 'surprise' of the natives was not only restricted to the inheritance law but directed at the Company's disregard for indigenous legal systems. In this context, Rammohun observed that the Company's decision to change the law was controversial not only from a *Śāstric* point of view, but also as a complete violation of how laws were formed, followed, legitimised and observed throughout the world:

In every country, rules determining the rights of succession to an alienation of property first originated either in the conventional choice of the people or in the discretion of the highest authority, secular or spiritual; and those rules have been subsequently established by the common usages of the country and confirmed by judicial proceedings.<sup>697</sup>

Rammohun deliberately universalised his point to demonstrate the importance of his next argument- that the Company's arbitrary change in the law had led to problems in governmental accountability. This argument was a simple exercise in legal procedure. Rammohun reasoned that judges who were not 'obliged to consult' the established legal codes could not be held accountable for their decisions.

We are at a loss to reconcile this arbitrary change with reason; because, any being capable of reasoning would not I think countenance the investiture in one person of the power of legislation with the office of the judge. In every civilised country rules and codes are found proceeding from one authority and their execution left to another. Experience shows that unchecked power often leads the best men wrong and produces general mischief.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 394.

<sup>698</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 395.

Rammohun's basic idea was this- the concentration of power in the hands of a single judicial officer employed by the government would lead the break-down of the entire system of administration due to its unaccountability. We note that *Brief Remarks* also made a similar argument that unaccountable 'Brahmin' legislators had historically led to the collapse of governments in India.

*Ancestral Property* and *Brief Remarks* also shared another argument. In both tracts, Rammohun argued that the *Dāyabhāga* was a part of an *Śāstric* tradition of law since its author, Jimutavahana critically interpreted *Śāstric* texts.<sup>699</sup> Rammohun further argued that Company officials were not unaware that:

1<sup>st</sup> Certain writings such as the institutes of Manu and others esteemed as sacred by Hindus are the foundation of their law of inheritance. 2ndly. That Jimutavahana, the author of the *Dāyabhāga* is but a commentator on those writings.<sup>700</sup>

*Ancestral Property* also expanded and developed Rammohun's political thought by introducing political concepts and ideas with greater visibility than *Brief Remarks*. While *Brief Remarks* explained Rammohun's ideas on history and government from the vantage point of a footnote, *Ancestral Property* included Rammohun's ideas in the main text. In *Brief Remarks*, Rammohun had ended his footnote-narrative with the assertion that the Indian 'empire' had been inherited by the British in India but not developed the concept of empire any further. In *Ancestral Property* Rammohun noted that:

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<sup>699</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 402.

<sup>700</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 396.

At present the whole empire (with the exception of a few provinces) has been placed under British power and some advantages have already been derived from the present management of its rulers from whose general character a hope of future quiet and happiness is justly entertained. The succeeding generation will however be more adequate to pronounce the real advantages of rule.<sup>701</sup>

In *Ancestral Property* however Rammohun explained that the 'empire' in India was a patchwork of diverse local practices which had been historically integrated within a politico-legal framework by the *Śāstras*. He argued that:

India, like other large empires, is divided into several extensive provinces, principally inhabited by Hindus and Mussalmans. The latter admit but a small degree of variety in their religious and domestic usages while the Hindus of each province are distinguished by peculiarities of dialect, habits, dress and forms of worship; and notwithstanding they unanimously consider their legislators as inspired writers, collectively revealing human duties, nevertheless their exist discrepancies among them in the received precepts of civil law.<sup>702</sup>

The 'legislators' here referred to *Śāstric* theorists who formulated laws by interpreting local practices. Thus Rammohun implied that legal systems developed in response to different social practices and differed across regions. Further, this process was aided by the linguistic differences between the various regions of India. In this context he noted:

The language of Telangana and other provinces of the South India not being of Sanskrit origin is still more strikingly different from the language of Bengal and the dialects of the upper provinces [North India]. The variety observable in their respective habits and forms of dress

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<sup>701</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 446.

<sup>702</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 389.

and worship is by no means more striking than that of their respective languages. As to civil law [in North and South India] differences have existed [based on these criterion].<sup>703</sup>

We note that Rammohun did not mark out language as the primary determinant of legal differences in India but noted that differences in dress and ‘habits’ had an equally important effect on the development of the law.

Rammohun’s bold interpretation however raises the question of how far his ideas were a reflection of *Śāstric* doctrine. According to Olivelle, the *Śāstras* indeed integrated a diverse set of local practices into a textual tradition of law. In this context, Olivelle opined that the *Śāstric* tradition was a ‘textualisation’ of local practice.<sup>704</sup> He showed in this process began with the earliest and the most authoritative of the tradition, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*.

The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* conceptualised of government consisting of different local autonomies, integrated within the framework of a large administration. Later *Śāstric* authors and commentators followed the framework of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*. For example, later *Śāstric* commentators such as Katyayana, Patanjali and Apastamba also argued that the *Dharmaśāstras* reflected ‘the actual practices of the local groups in society’.<sup>705</sup>

Since Rammohun’s tracts on Property law cited both Katyayana and Apastamba, it is reasonable to assume that he would have been familiar with their arguments.<sup>706</sup> Thus, we conclude that Rammohun’s interpretation of the *Śāstras* as a textual tradition

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<sup>703</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 389-90.

<sup>704</sup> Olivelle, ‘Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*’, 173.

<sup>705</sup> Olivelle, ‘Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*’, 173.

<sup>706</sup> Olivelle, ‘Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*’, 174.

which legitimised and legalised local practices was based on a realistic reading of the literature since the ‘textualisation’ of diverse local practices was always core to their idea of government.

I argue that Rammohun’s stress on the *Śāstric* ideas of the local was an attempt to re-orient the current system of administration into a form of state which reflected *Śāstric* ideas.

The viability of this argument can also be seen from the work of Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya on Early-Indian political thought.<sup>707</sup> According to Chattopadhyaya, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* advocated that the various classes of society would govern themselves according to their social practices and the state would only appoint officials as over-lookers.<sup>708</sup> The key position of official over-lookers has also been highlighted by Olivelle as central concern of *Śāstric* literature. As Olivelle argued:

The problem for the authors of the *Śāstras* was how to limit and control the enormous diversity with respect to norms of conduct prevalent in different regions, castes and communities across the vast land. The early history of the *Dharmaśāstra* testified to the continuing efforts to define and limit the universally authoritative practices to those prevalent in Brahminical communities and even there to draw boundaries, both geographical and ideological, around especially authoritative Brahmins.<sup>709</sup>

In this context we note that Rammohun’s footnote-narrative in *Brief Remarks* argued that the appointment of qualified official overseers (‘legislators’) was chief concern of Indian political systems. *Brief remarks* had provided a terse warning for

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<sup>707</sup> Chattopadhyaya, *Early India*, 135-152.

<sup>708</sup> Chattopadhyaya, *Early India*, 140-1.

<sup>709</sup> Olivelle, ‘Early History of the *Dharmaśāstras*’, 177.

administrations which did not take the appointment of such officials seriously and instead introduced 'tyrannical and arbitrary' governments. Rammohun asserted that such administrations consequently faced social revolutions from its subjects. However we note that while *Brief Remarks* highlighted the threat of revolution in recurring detail, it did not explain the importance of the *Śāstras* to Company officials. In *Ancestral Property*, Rammohun attempted to explain the *Śāstric* idea of state to an administration which was unacquainted with it.

Rammohun's attempt to explain the legitimacy of the *Śāstras* to the Company men however had to address two key problems. First, Company officials did not consider the *Śāstras* as scripture or even scripture to have any relation to civil law and administration.<sup>710</sup> This was problematic for Rammohun since the legitimacy of the *Śāstras* was based on their status as Hindu scripture. Second, the Company cited a number of inconsistencies in *Śāstric* literature as a reason to disregard them as sources of law and political legitimacy.

To solve the problems, Rammohun focussed on the inconsistencies of the text that the Company men *did* consider as scripture- the Bible. He noted that:

A European reader will not be surprised at the differences [in *Śāstric* interpretation] when he observes that the discrepancies existing between the Greek, Armenian, Catholic, Protestant and Baptist churches, who, though they all appeal to the same authority, materially differ from

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<sup>710</sup> For example, even sixteen years after *Ancestral Property*, the Privy Council opinion of the *Dharmaśāstras* was: 'It is quite impossible for us to feel any confidence in our opinion, upon a subject like this, when that opinion is founded upon authorities to which we have access only through translations and when the doctrines themselves and the reasons by which they are supported or impugned are drawn from religious tradition, ancient usages and more modern habits of the Hindus with which we cannot be familiar'. Quoted in Ludo Rocher, 'Anglo-Hindu and Customary Law' in Donald Davis (ed.) *Studies in Hindu Law and Dharmaśāstra* (New York, 2012), 634.



each other in many practical points, owing to the different interpretations given to passages of the Bible by the commentators they respectively follow.<sup>711</sup>

The analogical argument with the Bible thus explained the case for the political legitimacy of the *Śāstras*. Rammohun was able to argue that discrepancies of *Śāstric* interpretation could not be upheld as the cause of their complete rejection by the Company, for like the Bible, the *Śāstras* were a source of scripture and political legitimacy for any ruling government.<sup>712</sup>

Secondly, Rammohun explained the *Śāstric* 'inconsistencies' by showing them to be an emphasis on local practices. He noted that this was not however a *Śāstric* peculiarity:

In answer to the [diversity in *Śāstric* law] we must refer to common law and the established usages of every country as furnishing the distinctions admitted between one class and the other. The reference suggested is, I think, the sole guide upon such questions; and pursuant to that maxim I may be permitted to [insist upon] the law and usages of Bengal.<sup>713</sup>

Finally, Rammohun argued that the *Śāstric* emphasis on local practices could be understood Company officials *from the point of view of their own judiciary in Britain*. Perhaps anticipating that this argument would be rigorously challenged in Company circles, Rammohun wrote with unusual directness that:

Do Britons experience any inconvenience or disadvantage owing to the differences of legal institutions between England and Scotland or between one county of England and another? What would Englishmen say, were the Court of the King's Bench to adopt the law of Scotland

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<sup>711</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 390.

<sup>712</sup> As chapter six will show, Rammohun published a series of tracts on the Bible from 1821-3 at Calcutta and London which interpreted the Bible as 'a source of civil law' and thus the basis of all legal systems in Britain.

<sup>713</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 409.

as the foundation of their decisions regarding legitimacy of Kent in questions of inheritance? Every liberal politician will, I think, coincide with me, when I say, that in proportion as a dependent kingdom approximates to her guardian country in manners, in statutes, in religion and in social and domestic usages, their reciprocal relation flourishes and their mutual affection increases.<sup>714</sup>

Rammohun's stress on the 'reciprocal relation' between Britain and India signalled the importance of his intervention, as a native intellectual, arguing for a *Śāstric* framework of law. It also underscored the simple but powerful idea that Rammohun's political thought, though based on sources which officials in London did not know of, could nevertheless be explained in terms of legal and political principles which they adhered to in Britain.

In this way, the *Dharmaśāstras* were explained to Company officials using terms, categories and references which they were familiar with. Ultimately, it was not just the *Dharmaśāstras* but the way he explained them to his readers which defined his political thought.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the *Dharmaśāstras* was the source of Rammohun's ideas of accountability and good governance. Rammohun's arguments were addressed to two distinct readers- Company officials and contemporary Bengali society. Since neither set of readers would have been familiar with an *Śāstric* political vocabulary, Rammohun explained his ideas in terms that they would have been familiar with.

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<sup>714</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chandra Ghose, 396.

To Company officials, Rammohun used terms such as 'constitution', 'executive', 'legislature' and 'common law' to explain his ideas. Contrary to current scholarship, the chapter has shown that Rammohun's references to words such as 'constitution' and to liberal political theory were not evidence of a western liberal philosophy but ways to reach out to an official readership. To Bengali society, Rammohun explained his ideas by employing *Purāṇic* myth.

Rammohun's concept of governance also took into account the peculiar position of the Company in India. As a representative of ideas and institutions located in London, the Company seemed immune to supervision from London and its subjects in India were unfamiliar with its ideas of government. In this context, Rammohun argued that while everyday supervision from London was quite impossible, accountability to the natives was far more achievable. He also warned of the danger of social revolution if the government was not accountable to its subjects.

Rammohun introduced his ideas of accountable government and theory of state in *Brief Remarks* and completed his argument in *Ancestral Property*. *Brief remarks* referred to a history of governance which demonstrated the role of protest, dissent and violence in political relations and stressed the importance of accountable forms of government. *Ancestral Property* showed that the basic legal principles which supported the legitimacy and practical relevance of the *Śāstras* in governance could be understood by Company officials by using terms which they were familiar with.

Rammohun's ideas on accountability and governance also appeared in a petition to the Supreme Court in Calcutta (*Memorial*) and King in Council in London (*Appeal*) on the freedom of the press in 1823. The *Memorial* and the *Appeal* were significant because

of their importance to Rammohun's political project. Rammohun would not be able to criticise the lack of governmental accountability quite so freely with a highly regulated press.

Rammohun's ideas were articulated to an administration which understood little of the customs and practices of its subjects. His writings on property law highlighted the implications of this context. For example, *Brief Remarks* argued that the Company's interpretation of polygamy as a legitimate and legal practice showed how little the Company officials understood *Śāstric* law, which specifically prohibited polygamy.

The next chapter is concerned with a similar argument. From 1818-31, Rammohun argued that the Company had mistakenly interpreted *Sati* as a legitimate social practice. Unsurprisingly, the *Dharmaśāstras* and its ideas of government lay at the core of his understanding of *Sati*. The focus on his *Sati* writings demonstrates the applicability of his political thought in the most important of his projects of social reform.

## Chapter Five: Rammohun's explanation of *Sati* at Calcutta and London, c.1818-31.

### Introduction

*Sati* refers to the ancient Hindu practice of immolating widows on the funeral piles of their husbands.<sup>715</sup> Although references to *Sati* in India are found in ancient and medieval indigenous sources as a religious rite, the scriptural sanction for the practice is ambiguous and has been contested throughout its history.<sup>716</sup>

This chapter is concerned with Rammohun Roy's writings on *Sati* (which appeared as essays, dialogues, petitions and letters in English and Bengali and were distributed and published at Calcutta and London from 1818-31). It argues that Rammohun articulated his political thought of social ethics and governmental accountability to a readership consisting of the Bengali public and Company administrators at Calcutta and at London through his criticism of *Sati*.

We note in this context that recent scholarship on the intellectual history of Bengal has not perceived Rammohun's writings on *Sati* as part of his political thought. This can be seen in the work of Christopher Bayly (whose conceptualisation of Rammohun as a constitutional liberal did not include his ideas on *Sati*) and Andrew Sartori (who did not consider *Sati* to be specific to Rammohun's classical liberalism).

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<sup>715</sup> The earliest evidence for *Sati* in European sources on India is 316 B.C. Ania Loomba, 'Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India', *History Workshop*, 36 (1993), 210.

<sup>716</sup> Arvind Sharma, 'The scriptural sanction for *Sati*' in *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Delhi, 1996), 31-8.

Apart from the historians of ideas, social historians of *Sati* in Bengal (such as Geraldine Forbes, Ania Loomba, Kumkum Sagari and Suresh Vaid) also do not consider Rammohun's writings on *Sati* to be a part of his political thought. This is primarily due to the limitations of the conceptual scope of their writings.<sup>717</sup> The best example of this school of writing, is Lata Mani's study of *Sati* in the early nineteenth century, *Contentious Traditions: the debate on Sati in Colonial India*. The chapter engages with the framework, arguments and implications of *Contentious Traditions* throughout. For this reason, we briefly summarise its arguments.

Lata Mani argued that the practice of *Sati* in the early-nineteenth century led to an unequal debate on 'authentic Hindu tradition' amongst Company officials and the indigenous elite in Bengal in which the former had a disproportionate influence on the arguments of the latter. The Company's debates on *Sati* however was not motivated by concern for the widow's welfare but by fears of revolution from its subjects and maintained detailed records of the practice from 1815 onwards to show that the prevalence of *Sati* was such that legislating against the practice would lead to civil strife.

To Mani, 1815 marked the originating point of 'colonial knowledge' on *Sati* since native supporters and opponents of *Sati* began to construct their arguments by referring to 'colonial' data from this point onwards.<sup>718</sup> Consequently, indigenous responses to *Sati* were constructed much the same way as Company ideas of *Sati* ('colonial discourse').

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<sup>717</sup> Anand Yang, 'Who's *Sati*? Widow Burning in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century India', *Journal of Women's History*, 1(1989), 8.

<sup>718</sup> Colonial knowledge is also explained as 'the mode of understanding Indian society alongside colonial rule and over time, shared to a greater or lesser extent by officials [...] and the indigenous elite'.

In this context, Mani asserted that Rammohun's writings against *Sati* were not very different from the current colonial discourse. She argued that Rammohun, like his opponents and Company officials, was not concerned with 'the suffering widow' but the construction of an 'authentic Hindu tradition' based on Brahminical scripture such as the *Dharmaśāstras*. Her arguments implied that Rammohun did not have a political thought of his own.<sup>719</sup>

This chapter will focus on Mani's argument and show that it does not present an accurate representation of Rammohun's views on *Sati* due to two main limitations:

Firstly, while Rammohun was concerned with Hindu scripture, particularly the *Dharmaśāstras*, he interpreted the *Śāstras* as texts of everyday ethical practice to criticise the contemporary practice of *Sati* (which he argued was a result of a complete lack of social ethics). This argument follows from the previous chapter's conclusion that Rammohun interpreted the *Śāstras* as authoritative prescriptions of social conduct and governmental policy. In *Sati* writings, Rammohun argued that on social conduct, the *Śāstras*, 'authorised' the immediate family and marital relations of the widow with a duty of care; and on government policy, decreed that the government had a duty to provide for the widow's welfare.

Secondly, Mani's analysis of Rammohun's ideas on *Sati* are based on only two main writings: *Abstract of Arguments on Sati* (1830) and *Second Conference between an advocate and opponent of burning widows alive* (1820).<sup>720</sup> This presents a very limited

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'Contentious Traditions: The debate on Sati in Colonial India', *Cultural Critique: The Nature and Content of Minority Discourse*, 11 (1987), 121.

<sup>719</sup> Mani, *Contentious traditions*, 2-3.

<sup>720</sup> Mani, *Contentious traditions*, 49.

view of Rammohun's work. As this chapter shows, a focus on the wider body of Rammohun's writings reveals two parallel strands of thought addressed to two distinct readers- the Bengali public and the Company administrators addressed in separate writings.

This chapter is structured on the basis of the intended readership of Rammohun writings and is divided into two sections. Section one examines Rammohun's arguments for the Bengali public. This section focuses on a close reading of his writings on *Sati* in order to conceptualise his ideas of ethics. Section two is concerned with Rammohun's writings to Company administrators. The chapter will conclude that Rammohun was concerned with ethics, accountability and governance throughout his writings on *Sati*.

### **Section one: *Sati* as domestic abuse: a case for ethics**

Rammohun developed his ideas of ethics based on observations of the everyday lives of women in Bengal. Historians do not however consider Rammohun's ideas of *Sati* to have been rooted in his perspective and criticism of Bengali domesticity.<sup>721</sup> Geraldine Forbes for example, argued that Rammohun's ideas on *Sati* had little to do with his understanding of the personal lives of Bengali women in the early-nineteenth century.<sup>722</sup>

A study of Rammohun's writings to the Bengali public however demonstrates a consistent argument that the contemporary prevalence of *Sati* was the consequence of the normalisation of domestic abuse in Bengali society. Rammohun developed this

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<sup>721</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1999), 10.

<sup>722</sup> Forbes, 11-5.



argument in two major tracts; *A Conference between an advocate and opponent of the practice of burning widows alive* (1818) and *Second Conference between an advocate and an opponent of burning widows alive* (1820). The term ‘Conferences’ is used here to denote both tracts. We note that Rammohun’s ideas of ethics have never been the focus of historical scholarship and in this context re-interpret the *Conferences* to highlight this core feature of his work on *Sati*.

The *Conferences* collectively posed a challenge to the contemporary belief that the performance of *Sati* guaranteed the widow, her husband and their maternal and paternal relations a place in heaven by arguing that human beings were an end by themselves and not merely a means to an end (such as an afterlife in heaven). The main argument in both tracts was that the practice of *Sati* violated the victims’ rights. In this context, the *Conferences* consistently presented the Bengali widow as a victim. This argument was articulated by focussing on unequal relations of power in the household and by highlighting a lack of empathy in Bengali society for the widow.

The first *Conference* (1818) introduced this argument through a debate between an ‘advocate’ and an ‘opponent’ of *Sati*. Its opening dialogue is significant to our argument. Rammohun (or the ‘opponent’ of *Sati*) was told by a critic (‘advocate’ of *Sati*) that:

I am surprised that you endeavour to oppose the practice and Concremation and Postcremation of widows long observed in the country.<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>723</sup> *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selection from the Records, 1775-1845*, ed. J.K. Majumdar (Calcutta, 1941), 89.

The use of terms such as ‘Concremation’ and ‘Postcremation’ highlight Rammohun’s familiarity with the scriptural vocabulary on *Sati*. As Rammohun explained to his readers in a footnote, ‘Concremation’ referred to the immolation of the widow alongside the body of her husband, and ‘Postcremation’ referred to a *Sati* committed after the husband’s body had been cremated.<sup>724</sup>

The critic’s (or ‘advocate’) opening dialogue also explained the specific points on which Rammohun wished to intervene. Firstly, the suggestion that Rammohun alone was criticising the practice of *Sati* was a mistaken one. Rammohun instead argued that his ideas were widely shared in Bengal. Second, the critic’s contention that *Sati* was a historically established ritual would be a core point of debate in the tract. Addressing the entire community of advocates of *Sati*, Rammohun argued that:

Those who do not have any reliance on the *Śāstra* and those who take delight in the self-destruction of women may well wonder that we should oppose that suicide which is opposed by all *Śāstras* and by every race of men.<sup>725</sup>

This argument was thus made in an *Śāstric* context. Rammohun argued that *Sati* was an act of suicide of women which had been forced by the sadistic tendencies of those who promoted *Sati*. He noted in this context that suicide was prohibited in the *Śāstras*. This showed that the advocate of *Sati* had neglected the prescriptions of the *Śāstras* while Rammohun had interpreted them correctly. Rammohun also asserted that suicide was prohibited by ‘every race of men’ to counter the advocate’s argument about *Sati* being a legitimate practice because it had been ‘long observed in the

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<sup>724</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. Majumdar, 89.

<sup>725</sup> *The English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose, (Calcutta, ii, 1982), 323.

country'. Rammohun argued instead that lengthy traditions did not imply ethical practice and that *Sati* was not a culturally specific ritual but a universally unethical practice.

The first *Conference* now presented a series of terse dialogues on ethics between Rammohun and the advocate of *Sati*. At first, the advocate of *Sati* did not engage with Rammohun's ideas but dismissed the notion of ethical practice as an example of a biased agenda which ignored scriptural evidence to the contrary such as *Śāstric* texts, *Angira* and *Harita*.<sup>726</sup> Rammohun however argued that the *Śāstras* quoted by the advocate did not have the same authority as *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, the most important of the *Śāstras*.<sup>727</sup> After the scriptural explanation, the advocate conceded to Rammohun but still did not change his views on *Sati*.<sup>728</sup> At this point, Rammohun defined the pro *Sati* stance as:

[...] highly inconsistent with justice. It is in every way improper [and] to persuade self-destruction [...] is in fact deliberate murder.<sup>729</sup>

Rammohun's perception of *Sati* as 'deliberate murder' drew the attention of the reader from the rite to the victim. He argued that the *Sati* victim was tied to the funeral pile of her husband and trapped under heavy bamboos was legal evidence of coercion and the intent to kill.<sup>730</sup> Although Rammohun's consistent references to the *Śāstras* have led to criticism by Lata Mani that *Sati* was conceptualised as the site of a

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<sup>726</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 324.

<sup>727</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 325.

<sup>728</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 325-6.

<sup>729</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 329.

<sup>730</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 329.

religio-historical tradition, we find that in the first *Conference*, *Sati* was seen as a contemporary unethical practice in Bengal.

Rammohun's consistent references to the *Śāstras* was to highlight the illegality of the practice than an attempt to construct its historicity. For example, Rammohun noted that none of the *Śāstras* *advocated* the tying down of widows and the placing of heavy bamboos over them on the funeral pyre to prevent their escape.<sup>731</sup>

The evidence for the argument that Rammohun conceptualised the *Śāstras* as texts of ethical practice can be seen from the advocate's admission that the practice of tying down widows had no scriptural sanction but was rooted in contemporary social anxieties such as the fear of ridicule by 'others'.<sup>732</sup> This signalled an important shift in the *First Conference*. A reference to the *Śāstras* had convinced the advocate that *Sati* was a contemporary practice being carried out to prevent societal gossip than a societal ritual.

The advocate however elevated societal 'gossip' to a 'sin'.<sup>733</sup> Rammohun's response was that the advocate's conception of sin and gossip was deeply flawed since the social ridicule he feared came from those sections of society who advocated murder:

Respecting the sinfulness of such an act [of not supporting *Sati*] that is mere talk [...] the disgrace in the opinion of others is also nothing. Good men [do not] regard [...] the blame or reproach of persons who can reprobate those who abstain from the sinful murder of women.

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<sup>731</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

<sup>732</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

<sup>733</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

Do you not consider how great a sin it is to kill a woman [...] merely from a dread of the reproach of those who delight in female murder?<sup>734</sup>

Rammohun also called for a more domiciled and localised view of the argument for tying down widows. The fact that the practice was restricted to Bengal and not in any way 'prevalent throughout Hindustan' meant that *Sati* was a product of specifically Bengali social anxieties.<sup>735</sup> The advocate's response to Rammohun only echoed the anxiety of the supporters of *Sati*:

The practice of *Sati* may be sinful or anything else but we shall not refrain from observing it. Should it cease, people will generally apprehend that if women do not perform Concremation on the death of their husbands they might go astray; but when they burn themselves, that fear is done away. Their family and relations are free from apprehension. And if the husband could be assured during his life that his wife would follow him on the pile then his mind would be free from apprehensions of her misconduct.<sup>736</sup>

The advocate's argument signified the transition from a scripture based debate to a statement of the social anxieties of the Bengali community and justified *Sati* with a theory of social control of the women in the Bengali household than *Śāstric* doctrine:

There is a great difference between the case of a husband's being alive and his death; for while a husband is alive, whether he resides near or at a distance a wife is under his control. She must stand in awe of him. But after his death, that authority ceases and she is of course divested of fear.<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

<sup>735</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

<sup>736</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 330.

<sup>737</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 331.

The advocate's theory of social control was based on three propositions: First, he argued that wives were always subordinate to their husbands in Bengali households. Secondly, he asserted that husbands exercised a legitimate social control over their wives. Third, he opined that the consequence of not committing *Sati* was that the wife (now widow) would rebel against contemporary norms and practices of control in the household and lead to social unrest. The advocate concluded that since social stability was dependent on the husband being alive, his death would lead to social anarchy *unless Sati was performed*.

Rammohun's disagreement with this theory was given via an *Śāstric* interpretation. We find that the interpretation was not focussed on creating a historical past as much as focussing on an urgent contemporary need to focus on welfare. Rammohun argued for example, that the advocate's ideas were a violation of social and state norms prescribed by the *Śāstras* according to which the widow was to be supported by her family relations (maternal and paternal).<sup>738</sup> Secondly, the advocate's conception of social control was a misinterpretation of the idea of marriage.<sup>739</sup> Rammohun argued the *Śāstras* as well as contemporary social realities indicated that marriage ought not to be based on social control and subordination but everyday ethical practices:

You [the advocate of *Sati*] daily see that even when the husband is alive [...] the wife separates from him. [Social] control alone cannot restrain evil thoughts, words, actions [...] Both the *Śāstras* and experience show this.<sup>740</sup>

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<sup>738</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 331.

<sup>739</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 331.

<sup>740</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 331.

The first *Conference* thus articulated an argument for ethical practice by stressing the importance of everyday forms of conduct ('thoughts, words, actions') in the household.<sup>741</sup> Towards the end of the tract, this argument would be developed further to assert that the opponents of *Sati* were in the majority while the supporters of *Sati* were a select group whose had a 'lack of empathy' for the *satī* was a product of and amounted to, a regrettable lack of everyday ethical practice in Bengal.<sup>742</sup>

The first *Conference* concluded that the practice of *Sati* was deeply detrimental to societal welfare, but not seen as such because it had been normalised in Bengali society to the point that its advocates did not perceive it as an inhuman act.<sup>743</sup> This conclusion had little to do with references to colonial discourse, data and debates on tradition. Rather, it reflected Rammohun's ideas as a distinctly independent political thinker.

The response to the first *Conference* was mixed. Some newspapers reviewed the first *Conference* very positively but considered it to be a part of an existing discourse on social reform in Bengal rather an articulation of Rammohun's own ideas. For example, the Baptist Missionary newspaper, *Friend of India* considered the first *Conference* as an

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<sup>741</sup> For an alternative view see Dipesh Chakrabarty who argued that Rammohun's ideas of welfare of women was prompted by a self-initiation into western philosophy than everyday social practices in Bengal. Chakrabarty does not however provide any evidence of philosophical texts in Rammohun's writings. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial thought and Historical difference* (Princeton, 2000), 121.

<sup>742</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty in this context has argued that Rammohun's references to 'empathy' was a case for a 'collective social consciousness' against *Sati*. The category is too vague since Chakrabarty does not elaborate the idea of social consciousness. Instead, 'lack of empathy' is interpreted here as the lack of everyday ethical practice. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 121.

<sup>743</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 332.

extension of Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's opinion that the scriptural legitimacy of *Sati* was ambiguous.<sup>744</sup>

Other contemporary newspapers viewed the first *Conference* as distinct argument. The *India Gazette* (an English newspaper with an average daily circulation of 280 in Bengal) for example referred to a social context which had developed in response to the first *Conference*:

We have been informed that this little work [first *Conference*] has been published in a newspaper, which for some time past has been printed and circulated in the Bengali language and character under the sole conduct of the natives. This additional publicity which the labours of Rammohun Roy will thus obtain cannot fail to have beneficial consequences and we are happy to find that the conductors [editors] of the Bengali journal [*Sambad Kaumadi*] have determined to give insertion to articles that are likely to prove [...] advantageous to their countrymen.<sup>745</sup>

James Silk Buckingham's 'radical' English language newspapers and periodicals such as the *Calcutta Journal* and *Calcutta Gazette* published 'Appreciative notices' of the first *Conference* which included the entire tract.<sup>746</sup> Buckingham was a close associate of Rammohun and would be deported in 1823 for his views against the government.<sup>747</sup>

However, not all responses of the *First Conference* were positive and the argument of the tract also provoked harsh responses from advocates of *Sati*. Chandrika Payno, a correspondent for the Bengali newspaper, *Sambad Chandrika* was scathing in his

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<sup>744</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 156.

<sup>745</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar 117.

<sup>746</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar 114.

<sup>747</sup> The deportation from Bengal did not however stop Buckingham's writings against *Sati*. Buckingham criticised the government policy on *Sati* in his London journal, *Oriental Herald* and played an important role in mobilising British public opinion against the practice. Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 23.



criticism of favourable reviews of Rammohun's tract in English language newspapers.

Payno considered such reviews as misinformed and instead referred its readers to

*Dialogue between Bidhaok and Nissedhok* (1819) as the authentic *Śāstric*

interpretation of *Sati*. Payno's reference showed that Rammohun's tract had led to

influential rebuttals. For this reason, we briefly consider the arguments of the

*Dialogue*.

The *Dialogue* was an anonymous tract, structured much the same way as the

*Conference*, as a debate between an advocate (*Bidhaok*) and an opponent (*Nissedhok*)

of *Sati*. The writer of the tract, Kasinath Tarkavagish, shared the perspective of the

advocate of *Sati* or *Bidhaok* and the opponent of *Sati* (or *Nissedhok*) held the same

views as the opponent in the first *Conference*.<sup>748</sup>

The *Dialogue* was written as a response to Rammohun but ignored the first

*Conference's* conclusions about the unethical nature of *Sati* and instead focussed on

the question of whether *Sati* was a legitimate Hindu ritual. This can be seen with

*Bidhaok's* (advocate of *Sati*) opening argument to *Nissedhok* (opponent of *Sati*):

It is ordained by *śruti*, *smṛiti*, *Purāṇas* and other sacred books that the woman on the death of

her husband should [...] burn themselves alive with the corpse of their [...] husbands. It is very

improper that you throw obstacles in such a matter.<sup>749</sup>

The focus of the tract was thus the ritual of *Sati* than its victim. The *Dialogue* took on

two of the most important arguments of the first *Conference*. Firstly, it criticised and

set aside Rammohun's interpretation of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* that widows

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<sup>748</sup> Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 55.

<sup>749</sup> Harvard University Library, Boston, [Henceforth, HUL] Ms. Ind. 2014.1.5., 'Tracts by Rammohun Roy, c. 1772-1833', 1.

should live after the death of their husbands, arguing that later *Śāstric* commentaries which recommended *Sati* were better sources of information about the practice.<sup>750</sup>

Secondly, Rammohun's argument that the tying of widows to the funeral pile of her husband can be seen as evidence of intention to kill, which was an unforgivable sin in *Śāstric* law was dismissed.<sup>751</sup> Instead, Bidhaok argued that:

It is not inconsistent with the [*Śāstric*] Laws, that [...] the people attending funerals do bind the women because in the text of Harita [a later commentary on the *Dharmaśāstras*], it was expressed 'that until the women themselves cause their bodies to be wholly consumed by the fire, they cannot finally get rid of their sex. In which case should any part of their bodies whilst burning under the piles, be slipped put thereof, it cannot be wholly consumed [...] and is consequently inconsistent with the [*Śāstric*] Law. Know therefore that [according to the text of Harita] the people who attend the ordained action [of burning widows] are to reap glory and are not liable to sin.'<sup>752</sup>

The *Dialogue's* argument is entirely consistent with Rammohun's view that the advocates of *Sati* ignored the victimisation of the widow, avoided all discussions on the ethical implications of *Sati* and interpreted the *Dharmaśāstras* as authoritative prescriptions of ritual as opposed to ethical practices concerned with rights, duties, obligations of society and state and its implications on social welfare. This further explains Rammohun's deep interest in the *Śāstras* and the need to legitimate all his arguments with a reference to an *Śāstric* context.

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<sup>750</sup> HUL, Ms. Ind. 2014.1.5., 'Tracts', 2-3.

<sup>751</sup> HUL, Ms. Ind. 2014.1.5., 'Tracts', 2-3.

<sup>752</sup> HUL, Ms. Ind. 2014.1.5., 'Tracts', 2-17.

The *Dialogue*' contrast to the first *Conference* is most apparent in its explanation of *Sati*. While the *Dialogue* presented *Sati* as a ritual and *not a practice of burning widows*, the first *Conference* referred to *Sati* as 'the practice of burning of widows' than a *ritual*. Secondly, the discussions of everyday ethical practice in the household which featured prominently in the first *Conference* were absent in the *Dialogue*. Finally, the *Dialogue* denounced the first *Conference* by inverting its conclusion. While in the *Conference*'s conclusion, the advocate of *Sati* had agreed with the opponent; the *Dialogue* now presented a situation where the opponent of *Sati* (Nissedhok) unequivocally agreed to the practice and concluded that the scriptural authenticity of *Sati* was sound:

The several doubts that we have entertained regarding *Shuh Murn* [Concremation] and *Onoo Murn* [Postcremation] have been dispelled to hear the variety of instances you have given from the *Śāstras*.<sup>753</sup>

Our discussion on the *Dialogue* shows the degree to which Rammohun's emphasis on ethical practice and the interpretation of the *Śāstras* as moral philosophy differed from his critics. This was also the primary reason why the *Dialogue* prompted a detailed and systematic response from Rammohun in *Second Conference between an Advocate and Opponent of Burning widows alive* (1820). With reference to the *Dialogue*, Rammohun argued that its exclusive emphasis on scripture had led to a deeply disturbing absence of a focus on the *Sati* victim.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> HUL, Ms. Ind. 2014.1.5., 'Tracts', 17.

<sup>754</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 337.

The *Second Conference* was structured the same way as the first, as a debate between an 'advocate' and 'opponent'. However the *Second Conference* devoted an extensive amount of space to the *Śāstras*. This was because it was written in response to the *Dialogue*.<sup>755</sup> The *Second Conference* stressed that the *Dialogue*'s argument was flawed because of its problematic construction of women which opined:

Women are by nature of inferior understanding, without resolution, unworthy of trust, subject to passions, void of virtuous knowledge and not allowed to marry after the demise of her husband and consequently despair at once of all worldly pleasure.<sup>756</sup>

Rammohun thus rooted the ideas of the pro-*Sati* argument in contemporary social notions of gender. The stress on contemporary social attitudes is also a strong continuity with the first *Conference*. The *Second Conference* however was not a mere repetition of the first *Conference*. In a significant new development, Rammohun argued that the advocates' ideas of womanhood were based on the flawed assumption that women were socially dependent and cognitively *deficient* to the men when in fact Bengali women had been deliberately handicapped since they were not educated:

As to their inferiority in point of [intellectual] understanding [with men], when did you [the advocate of *Sati*] afford them a fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural [intellectual] capacity? How can you then accuse them of want of understanding? If after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught to him, we may consider him deficient, but as you keep women generally void of education and acquirements; you cannot in justice pronounce their inferiority.<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 337.

<sup>756</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 359-60.

<sup>757</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 360.

To Rammohun, the lack of education led to unequal relations of power in the household. This laid the social foundations of domestic abuse and ultimately, *Sati*:

Men are in general able to read and write and manage public affairs by which means they easily promulgate such faults as women occasionally commit, but never consider as criminal the misconduct of men towards women.<sup>758</sup>

The *Second Conference* traced the events leading up to *Sati* by rooting the consequences of subordination, lack of education, lack of public visibility in a discussion of marriage. The *Conferences'* arguments were also discussed in other writings. In the *Second Defence of the Vedānta*, for example, Rammohun opined that unethical practices which took place before marriage were a product of the contemporary subordination of women in Bengal than scriptural sanctions:

Although the acceptance of money or of a present in the marriage contract of a daughter is most strictly prohibited by the *Vedas* and by Manu, yet the sale of female children under the pretence of marriage is practiced by nearly two-thirds of the Brahmins of Bengal and Tirhoot and their followers generally.<sup>759</sup>

This argument was an important context to Rammohun's ideas of domesticity, abuse and subordination of women in the *Second Conference*, published the same year as *Second Defence of the Vedānta*:

[After marriage] the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house such as clean the place early in the morning whether cold or wet, to scour the dishes, to wash the floor. [In the afternoon] they fetch water from the river or tank. [At night] they perform the office of the menial servants in making the beds. In case of any fault or omission in the performance of

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<sup>758</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 361.

<sup>759</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 120.

these labours, they receive injurious treatment. [...] The woman is employed to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband, father and mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, friends and connections. If in the preparation or the serving of victuals, they commit the smallest fault, what insult do they not receive from their husbands, mother in law or younger brother of the husband? Amongst the lower classes and even those of the better class [...] the wife on the slightest fault or even the barest fault is chastised as a thief.<sup>760</sup>

The focus here is also on large households. Bengali households being comprised of large families only increased the burden of housework and scope of abuse:

Among the [Bengali] Hindus [...] relations long reside together, and on this account quarrels are more common [...]<sup>761</sup>

Rammohun point that women's labour throughout Bengali households was largely unrecognised can be seen in the phrases used to describe women's work- 'the work of a slave' and 'office of a menial servant'. He noted that the situation did not change with the standard of living of individual households:

As long as the husband is poor she suffers from every kind of trouble and when he becomes rich, she is altogether heartbroken. Should the husband acquire wealth he indulges in criminal armours under her perfect knowledge.<sup>762</sup>

Rammohun's emphasis on 'criminal armours' was not a general observation on social habits of men in Bengal but a specific reference to the practice of polygamy in Bengal by the highest class of Brahmins, the *Kulins*. In contemporary Bengal, *Kulin* practices

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<sup>760</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 362.

<sup>761</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 361.

<sup>762</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 362.

were considered to be legitimate due to their high caste status.<sup>763</sup> This did not mean however that they were immune from criticism. As Salahuddin Ahmed observed, *Kulin* polygamy was widely criticised and reported in contemporary Bengali newspapers.<sup>764</sup> Rammohun in this context strongly criticised *Kulin* legitimacy in *Second Defence of the Vedānta*:

[While] according to the authority of Manu, respect and distinction are due to a Brahmin merely in proportion of his knowledge; to certain Brahmins such as the *Kulins* however [are as] void of knowledge and principle they may be. This departure from law and justice was made by the authority of the prince of Bengal [...] three or four hundred years ago and this innovation may perhaps be considered as the chief source of decay of learning and virtue which I am sorry to say may be observed at present.<sup>765</sup>

While the *Second Defence* de-legitimised the social practices of the *Kulins*, the *Second Conference* argued that *Kulin* practices of polygamy further solidified and legitimised unequal power relations between the male and female members of the family. This led to subordination and abuse of women in the household:

How many *Kulin* Brahmins are there who marry 10-15 wives and never see the greater number of them after the day of marriage and visit others only 3 or 4 times in [the course of their] life. Sometimes the husband in preference to one of his wives behaves cruelly with another.<sup>766</sup>

Rammohun's references to *Kulin* practices was not a deviation from his main argument. Rather, it struck at the very heart of his opponents ideas of *Sati*.

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<sup>763</sup> Mukherjee, *Citizen Historian*, 45. Mukherjee shows that there no clear evidence of when this practice started and notes that the thirteenth century AD is earliest reference in indigenous sources.

<sup>764</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal* (Calcutta, 2003), 34.

<sup>765</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, Ghose, 121.

<sup>766</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, Ghose, 362.

Rammohun's opponents argued that *Sati* was a historical practice rooted in Brahminical scripture, the stress on the illegitimacy of the highest caste of Brahmins provided the context for his argument that *Sati* was a contemporary unethical social practice which was a product of widely prevalent domestic abuse in Bengal.

Rammohun noted in this context that the Company's administration also held the same views as contemporary Bengali society. Company magistrates for example operated under the same assumption as Bengali men, that women were inferior, subordinate, and not capable of being socially independent. This had devastating consequences for Bengali women because the Company failed to intervene at crucial points in which a future *Sati* could have been avoided.

Rammohun opined that the most important point at which Company intervention was crucial was marital separation. However, marital separations, though common, were never permanent in Bengal, since women were coerced back into the household by Company magistrates.<sup>767</sup> After returning to the household, abuse increased to the point that the previously estranged wife was 'privately put to death' by her husband.<sup>768</sup> If the husband died, family and relatives forced her to commit *Sati*.<sup>769</sup> Thus Rammohun pointed to failures in governance which had led to the abetment of domestic abuse and *Sati* in Bengal.

Apart from Company magistrates, the *Conferences* also contained references for a broader audience of Company officials. The English language translation of the *First Conference* for example noted that:

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<sup>767</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 362.

<sup>768</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 362.

<sup>769</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 362.



The little tract, originally written in Bengali has been for several weeks past in extensive circulation [...] An idea that the arguments it contains might tend to alter the notions that some European gentlemen entertain on the subject has induced the writer to lay it before the British public also in its present dress.<sup>770</sup>

Thus Rammohun's arguments on *Sati* concerned the Company men as much as Bengali society. The *Second Conference* even appealed directly to the Marchioness of Hastings for an official intervention and implied that a lack of British intervention would mean an instance of misgovernance of its subjects:

The following tract being a translation of a Bengali Essay published some time ago as an appeal to reason on behalf of humanity, I take the liberty to dedicate to Your Ladyship [Marchioness of Hastings]; for to whose protection can any attempt to promote the benevolent purpose be with so much propriety committed?<sup>771</sup>

A possible reason why the *Second Conference* was addressed to the Marchioness of Hastings instead of her husband, Marquis of Hastings (and the Governor-General of Bengal), could be the lack of response to an earlier petition addressed directly to him. The content of this failed petition and its follow up writings, letters and tracts reveals an important strand of Rammohun's writings on *Sati* which focussed on his conception of *Sati* as misgovernance urged governmental intervention and outlined the duties and obligations of government to its subjects. This is the subject of the next section.

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<sup>770</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose

<sup>771</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 336.

## Section Two: *Sati* as misgovernance

In August 1818, Rammohun Roy petitioned the Governor-General, Marquis of Hastings against the practice of *Sati*.<sup>772</sup> Hastings was widely perceived to be a reformer in Bengal since he had pushed through press reforms as part of a new Company policy towards newspapers as ‘a useful instrument in promoting good government’ earlier that year.<sup>773</sup>

Hastings’ press reforms had an enormous impact on social reform in India since it led to the foundation of the first vernacular newspapers.<sup>774</sup> Rammohun himself made wide use of the vernacular press, editing the Bengali (and English) newspaper, *Sambad Kaumadi* and the Persian weekly, *Mirāt al-Akhhbār*.<sup>775</sup> The *Kaumadi* was an important platform for his project against *Sati*. Given this background, it is not surprising that Rammohun addressed the petition to Hastings.

Unfortunately, for Rammohun, Hasting’s ideas of reform did not extend to *Sati*. In 1817 Hastings shelved a proposal to extend Company regulation of *Sati*.<sup>776</sup> This would prove to be a disastrous step since 1818 recorded an unprecedented increase in the annual number of *satīs*.<sup>777</sup> In this context, Rammohun’s petition would have irked the Governor General since his main argument was that *Sati* was a form of misgovernance. Rammohun’s petition represents a parallel strand in his writings on *Sati*. Consider for example, the difference between the petition and the first *Conference*. Both appeared

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<sup>772</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 115.

<sup>773</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 85.

<sup>774</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 88-93.

<sup>775</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 121.

<sup>776</sup> Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 19.

<sup>777</sup> Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 21.

in 1818 but while the first *Conference* was primarily concerned with the social ethics of Bengali society, the petition was about the government's accountability to an ethical public. The argument about the existence of an ethical public was crucial to the petition. As Rammohun stressed:

That your petition writers have considered themselves as passing the bounds of respect due to the wisdom of your Lordship's councils in presuming to offer any opinion whatsoever regarding the measures adopted by the government of the security of their lives or property of their fellow subjects were they not impelled to vindicate themselves from the disgrace that in the opinion of all men impressed with the common feelings of humanity and therefore especially your Lordship's government.<sup>778</sup>

Rammohun made two major arguments. Firstly, he argued that the government was obligated to protect the lives and property of its subjects. In this context, practice of *Sati* violated this obligation since it amounted to murder committed to possess the widow's property. Second, he traced the conception of obligations of government to Hindu law and argued that the *Dharmaśāstras* prohibited murder and the *Dāyabhāga* laws called upon the state to protect the property of the widow. Even in cases where *Sati* was not committed in order to seize the widows' property, the practice itself amounted to suicide which was illegal in Hindu law:

That all these instances of suicide [...] are in direct opposition to the *Śāstras* of Hindu faith and it seems an insult to the known humanity of the British nation as well as Your Lordship's government even to imagine that such of these practices [...] should be permitted to exist.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 115.

<sup>779</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 115.

Although Rammohun had also described *Sati* as suicide in the first *Conference*, the petition explained the implications of suicide differently. In the first *Conference* suicide was seen as an undesirable social event while the petition perceived suicide as a failure of government to promote the welfare of the widow.

The argument about misgovernance was further developed in Rammohun's criticism of the official position that *Sati* was a closely monitored practice which consisted of the widow of the husband immolating herself voluntarily on his funeral pile based on eye-witness accounts

Your Petitioners are fully aware from their own knowledge or from the authority of credible eye witnesses that cases have frequently occurred where women after flying from the flames [of their husbands funeral piles] have been carried back by their relatives and burnt to death [...] that women have been permitted to burn themselves on the funeral piles of men who are not their husbands, that widows of Brahmins have burnt themselves on a separate pile, that widows of other castes have burnt themselves several years after witnessing or learning the death of their husbands, have burnt on their funeral piles and mothers of infant children contrary to the dictates of nature and morality as well as law have abandoned their innocent offspring to burn themselves.<sup>780</sup>

Rammohun was not exaggerating the failures of government regulations. By 1820 the Company's criminal courts in Bengal *Nizamat Adalat* had also begun to notice the failures of the government to regulate *Sati*.<sup>781</sup> Two years later, the government finally recognised that its existing policy of police support was ineffective since it did not take native testimonies into account and passed a new order based on eyewitness

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<sup>780</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 115.

<sup>781</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 109-110.

testimonies of *Sati* citing instances very similar to that noted in the petition and informed every police station in Bengal that:

Whereas it has appeared that during the ceremony denominated *Sati*, certain acts have been occasionally committed in direct opposition to the rules laid down by the religious institutes of the Hindus by which the practice is authorised and forbidden in particular cases: as for instance at several places, pregnant women and girls not yet arrived at their full age have been burnt alive, and people having intoxicated women by administering intoxicating substances have burnt them without their assent while insensible and in much as this conduct is contrary to the *Śāstras* and perfectly inconsistent with every principle of humanity, the Police *Darogahs* [constables] are hereby accordingly under the sanction of Government strictly enjoined to use the utmost care and every effort to prevent the forbidden practices above mentioned from taking place within the limits of the *thana* [station].<sup>782</sup>

The effectiveness of the government's interventions in the form of police support were acknowledged by Rammohun in his newspaper, *Sambad Kaumadi* in the form of a *Sati* case. Rammohun first described the circumstances leading up to the case:

Vishnu Ganguly of Bag Bazar [a suburb of Calcutta] having died of the disease that is now prevailing in Calcutta and its environs [cholera], his wife, Vindhivasni under particular circumstances expressed a desire to burn herself alive with her deceased husband; the formalities ordained by the Government on this occasion being consequently over the *Sati* as customary, ascended the pile which was immediately set on fire. Some European and American gentlemen of respectability being present on the spot, the woman could not be bound down or otherwise secured as is the usual practice in this country and when the flames

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<sup>782</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 111-12.

rose, she was unable to bear the torture and made her escape from the pile with several parts of her body burnt.<sup>783</sup>

Rammohun noted that it was at this point that the *Thanadars* and *Darogahs* became crucial for the safety of the widow, for although she had escaped from the flames of the burning pile:

We understand that [...] she [Vindhivasni] was not safe in the hands of her cruel tormentors who would have endeavoured to force her back into the burning flames; but for the presence of the gentlemen of Europe and America *and the Thanadars, the parties were all sent to the magistrates.* (Emphasis mine)<sup>784</sup>

Vindhivasni had been saved because the ‘gentlemen of Europe and America’ and the *Thanadars* together prevented the *Sati* from taking place. Rammohun however noted that such interventions were not always the case:

We recollect a case of the same kind that happened [...] last year when the [widow] ran away, no one knows where. Had the men in the present case been able forcibly to accomplish the cremation of Vindhivasni, we should most probably have been told of the [widow] having ‘ascended the heavens in company with her husband pleased in her mind and with a satisfied conscience’. The prevention however of women being burnt against their will and the *Śāstras* is yet distant and cannot be brought about without the strictest attention of the good *Darogahs* or Police Officers.<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 130.

<sup>784</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 130.

<sup>785</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 131.

Rammohun's assessment of the government's regulation thus stressed on the need of a strategy of governance which reflected a uniform code of official responsibility throughout Bengal.

The origins of the *Sambad Kaumadi's* argument however can be found in Rammohun's petition of 1818 which explained his ideas of governance by constructing a working principle of governance guided by ethical principles of welfare. He pointed to practices which had been banned by the government such as female infanticide and human sacrifice and argued that that *Sati* should be seen on par with such practices:

Hindu [Bengali] society reflecting with pleasure and gratitude on the means that the [government] has adopted to prevent mothers from sacrificing their children at Ganga Sagar and likewise on the regulations in force against those [...] Rajputs who made it a rule of their caste to put female children to death and also against the practice formerly frequent of putting a relative to death that the crime of murder might fall on the head of an enemy look with the most lively hope to such a measure relative to the custom of burning widows as may be justly expected from [...] your Lordship's administration. All these [practices] your petitioners humbly submit are murders according to every Shastra as well as the common sense of all nations.<sup>786</sup>

The use of the phrase, 'the common sense of all nations', drew attention to the contrast that the practice of *Sati* posed to a government policy guided by ethical principles of welfare. This argument was further developed in Rammohun's pseudonymous tract in 1819 (under the name of an associate Harinanda Tirthaswami) which enabled Rammohun to adopt a persona of an ethical, informed Brahmin who

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<sup>786</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 114.

argued that the government's confusion about the legal status of *Sati* had led to more deaths in the meantime:

Without wishing to stand forward as an advocate or an opponent of the Concremation of widows with the bodies of their deceased husbands but ranking myself among Brahmins who consider themselves bound by birth [...] to maintain correct observance of Hindu law, I deem it proper to call the attention of the public to a point of great importance upon the determination of which the lives of thousands of the female sex depend.<sup>787</sup>

The tract distanced itself from Rammohun's writings by referring to *Sati* by its ritualistic term, 'Concremation' than the practice of 'burning widows alive which was the case in both *Conferences* and the petition of 1818. However the tract also reiterated Rammohun's basic point about *Sati* as a practice of murder by presenting *Sati* as a practice which had led to the loss of 'thousands' of female lives and even referred to Rammohun's petition to Hastings

In the year 1818 a body of Hindus prepared a petition for [...] burning widows not sanctioned by any *Shastra* while another body petitioned for further restrictions, if not the total abrogation of the practice upon the ground of its absolute illegality.<sup>788</sup>

The use of the term 'absolute illegality' showed that the pseudonymous tract was a much stronger assertion than the 1818 petition that Company administrators to recognise *Sati* as an act of murder which was incompatible with any system of ethics- Hindu or Christian- than a ritual specific to Hinduism. Rammohun also made a

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<sup>787</sup> *The Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Dilip Kumar Biswas (Calcutta, i, 1992), 38.

<sup>788</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 38.



distinction between an ethical public calling for the banning of *Sati* and the unethical project of the supporters of *Sati*:

[Even after] the practice of burning widows [...] has been declared illegal and murderous [...] I am at a loss to conceive how persons can reconcile themselves to the stigma of being accused of women murder without attempting to show the injustice of the charge they find themselves in.<sup>789</sup>

Tirthaswami's persona also seemed to provide greater space for assessments of government policy towards *Sati*:

I feel also surprise and regret that European gentlemen who boast about the humanity and morality of their religion should conduct themselves to persons who submit quietly to the imputation of murder with the same politeness and kindness that they would show to the most respectable persons.<sup>790</sup>

Rammohun's 'surprise and regret' was not without context. The official attitude towards any form of legislation against *Sati* can be seen in the Governor General, Lord Amherst's *Minute on Sati* in 1827 which declared:

I am not prepared to recommend an enactment prohibiting *Sati*'s altogether. [...] I am inclined to recommend our trusting to the progress now making in the diffusion of knowledge amongst the natives for the gradual suppression of this detestable superstition [...]<sup>791</sup>

Contributing to Rammohun's frustration with Company policy was pre-constructed ideas of Indianness and *Sati*. For example, in 1827, the Governor General's Council in Bengal wrote to Court of Directors that *Sati* should not be seen as murder or

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<sup>789</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 39.

<sup>790</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas 40.

<sup>791</sup> *Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 129.

misgovernance but a highly localised mental state. 'In certain districts of Bengal', they noted:

[...] the dispositions of the people are prone to violence, and their minds easily excited- in other [districts] the apathy of their general character and perfect submission to the will of their rulers precludes any ground for apprehension that they would offer the slightest opposition to the orders of the local authorities.<sup>792</sup>

Ultimately in 1829, the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck and his council of advisors supported by the Court of Directors did intervene to pass a regulation abolishing *Sati*. This was a marked change from Calcutta and London's attitude towards institutional reform in India. That it was also influenced to some degree by Rammohun's writings on *Sati* as misgovernance can be seen in the preamble of the regulation:

The practice of *Sati* or burning alive of the widows of Hindus is revolting to the feelings of human nature; it is nowhere enjoined by the religion of the Hindus as an imperative duty [...] The measures hitherto adopted to discourage and prevent such acts have failed [...] and the Governor-General is deeply impressed with the conviction that the abuses in question cannot be effectually put an end to without abolishing the practice altogether.<sup>793</sup>

The reference to *Sati* as 'burning alive of widows', the presentation of the practice as universally unethical and the denial of any religious sanction to it show that Rammohun's ideas of the illegality of *Sati* and of government intervention in the interest of social welfare had an influence on official policy. This was only however a partial success for Rammohun since his project of representing an ethical public was

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<sup>792</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 132.

<sup>793</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 153.

discredited and questioned in contemporary newspapers. For example, Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay, the editor of the conservative Bengali newspaper, *Samachar Chandrika* opined on the same day that *Sati* was abolished

[Rammohun] is no doubt born of an orthodox family, but how does he represent his forefathers, or his clan, or the [Bengali] community?<sup>794</sup>

Bhabanicharan was not an isolated critic. Rather he was a part of an orthodox Hindu community which opposed Rammohun's project of *Sati* and funded the *Chandrika*.<sup>795</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, 1830, Bhabanicharan along with important members of Bengali society such as *Pandits* of the Sanskrit college, Nimaychurun Sironomi, Huronath Tarkabhushan and wealthy landlords, Gopi Mohun Deb, Radhakanta Deb, Maharaja Kalikisen Bahadur, Nilomoni De, Gokulnath Malik, Bhabanicharan Mitter and Ramgopal Mitter presented a petition against the abolition of *Sati* to Bentinck:

[...] we [...] submit the following petition to your Lordship[...] in consequence of having heard that certain persons taking upon themselves to represent the opinions and feelings of the Hindu inhabitants of Calcutta have misrepresented those opinions and feelings and that your Lordship in Council is about to pass a resolution founded on such erroneous statements to put a stop to the practice of performing *Satis*, an interference with the religion and customs of the Hindus, which we most earnestly deprecate, and cannot view without the most serious alarm. [...]<sup>796</sup>

The petition can be read as an elaboration of Bhabanicharan's earlier argument on the 'irreligious' Rammohun's (mis) representation of the views of an ethical public and

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<sup>794</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 153.

<sup>795</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 125.

<sup>796</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 156.

interpretation of scripture. While Rammohun's tracts, letters, pseudonymous articles in newspapers had consistently argued that an ethical public could pressurise the government into legislating against the practice; the petition claimed that Rammohun did not have support from Bengali society but was an isolated figure in the debate on *Sati*. Its assessment of the *Sati* abolition was also a direct criticism of Rammohun's writings on good governance. While Rammohun had argued that the abolition of *Sati* would be an important step towards social welfare, the petition questioned the legitimacy of the government's regulation against *Sati* and assessed the government's legislation as:

Not only an unjust and intolerant dictation in matters of conscience but is likely wholly to fail in procuring the end proposed.<sup>797</sup>

The assessment was further supported with a historical narrative of the attitude of successive governments towards *Sati*:

Under the Mussalman conquerors of Hindustan [12 century AD] and certainly since this country came under Mughal government [16<sup>th</sup> century AD] [...] no interference with the practice of *Sati* was ever attempted. Since that period, and for nearly a century, the power of the British government has been established in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa and none of the Governor-generals or their councils have hitherto interfered in any manner to the prejudice of the Hindu religion or customs; and we submit that by various acts of Parliament in Great Britain, under the authority of which the Hon. Company itself exists, our religion and Laws, usages and customs, such as they have existed from time immemorial are inviolably secured to us.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>797</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar 157.

<sup>798</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 158.

The petition not only constructed a narrative of historical precedence which went back 600 years, but also presented Company rule in Bengal as a representative of British political traditions from London and included a number of important Company officials (including the chairman of the Court of Directors Nathaniel Smith, Governor-Generals' Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, Lord Cornwallis and Lord Moira) who had approved of *Sati*.

The historical narrative of administrative precedent strengthened the argument that the Company could not legislatively intervene in Indian social practices because it belonged to a very different system of laws. The authorities familiar with Indian law were referred to in detail. To this end, the petition contained the signatures of 120 Sanskrit *Pandits*, 800 Bengali inhabitants; and even a separate petition on the subject containing the signatures of 346 inhabitants and 28 *Pandits*.<sup>799</sup>

Bentinck however did not agree with petition's argument and opined that not only was the abolishment of *Sati* in keeping with Hindu law but that the Company would always intervene to abolish those social practices which it deemed illegal:

Thus none of the Hindus are placed in the distressing situation of having to disobey either the ordinances of the government or those of their religion. By [abolishing *Sati*] a Hindu widow not only complies at once with the laws of the government and with the purest precepts of her own religion but affords an example to the existing generation of that good conduct which is supposed to have distinguished the earlier and better times of the Hindu people.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>799</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 159.

<sup>800</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 162-3.

Bentinck's argument made a case for a uniform and consistent government policy towards *Sati*: First, the practice of *Sati* was contrary to British *and Śāstric* prescriptions of law (thus the petition's argument about unfamiliar British institutions in India neglecting core ideas of Hindu religion and society did not apply). Second, the focus of Hindu law was everyday ethical practice ('good conduct'). Thirdly, the abolishment of *Sati* was not an unprecedented measure since it was in accordance to a historical process of government commitment towards welfare. In this case, the government's abolishment of *Sati* was not an alien intervention into Indian social practices but a case of historical continuity. The second and third points of Bentinck's reply were elaborated upon by Rammohun in *Abstract of arguments regarding the burning of widows* which appeared the same year. Rammohun argued that Hindu law had been deliberately misinterpreted by *Sati* advocates to make the case for the illegality of government interventions. In this context Rammohun identified several examples of forgeries in Hindu laws which had been passed off as legitimate by his critics:

It is now unhappily reported that some advocates of the destruction of widows [...] have secretly composed works and passages and published them as though they were genuine, with a view to introducing new doctrines, new rites or new prescripts of secular law. Although they have frequently succeeded by these means in working on the means of the ignorant, yet the learned have never admitted the authority of any passage or work alleged to be sacred unless it has been quoted or expounded by one of the acknowledged authoritative commentators.<sup>801</sup>

Rammohun's point was that social rituals and laws required legitimation from the government and re-checking from qualified legal authorities in society who also had a

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<sup>801</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 371.

responsibility to speak out against fakes. Rammohun also introduced a simple rule to judge the legitimacy of a legal precept in which a law was legitimate only when it reflected ethical social practice.

Rammohun was confident of the success of this rule since he was convinced that the Bengali public who could pressurise the government into legislating against unethical social practices. In this context he opined that the abolition of *Sati* in 1829 had come about because the practice of *Sati* contradicted contemporary ethical norms.

Rammohun clearly thought of the abolition as the end of the *Sati* debate, offering 'thanks to heaven' for 'rescuing the weaker sex from cruel murder under the cloak of religion'.<sup>802</sup>

The abolishment of *Sati* by the Governor-General did not however lead to the end of the *Sati* debate. On February 6, 1830; the petition writers who had earlier been dismissed by Bentinck formed the *Dharma Sabha* to overturn the regulation against *Sati* by appealing to the Privy Council at London.<sup>803</sup> Thus, it recognised a centre of sovereign power that was located across the Ocean. This can also be seen in the opinions expressed by the *Samachar Chandrika*, which championed the *Dharma Sabha's* project of appeal:

We [the *Dharma Sabha*] believe that the Hindus are more devoted to their sovereign than other people; they never object to any law of the government. [...] If the Governor-General [Bentinck] had promulgated that Regulation [abolishing *Sati*] as an act of the King [of the

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<sup>802</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 163.

<sup>803</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 52.

United Kingdom] we should never have appealed to them [Privy Council] for then all our doubts would have been at end.<sup>804</sup>

The *Dharma Sabha's* ideas of *Sati* and its response to *Sati* was thus articulated in the context of the methods by which political power was articulated from London. At the heart of their ideas on Company administration and law making was the conviction that the Company governance was outside the purview of everyday life in India since the government was far too distant from its subjects.

The *Sabha* was also very practical in its approach towards organising a petition. A public appeal for a sum of 20,000 rupees was launched in the *Samachar Chandrika* for financing their project and a Supreme Court solicitor, Francis Bathie appointed as their representative.<sup>805</sup> The appointment of Bathie did not go unnoticed in Calcutta and his suitability as a representative was criticised in Rammohun's newspaper, *Sambad*

*Kaumadi*:

Can it be that the benevolent inhabitants of England have become so merciless that upon the simple advice of Mr. Bathie, without any authority of the *Śāstras* they will authorise the murder of thousands of women in this country?<sup>806</sup>

The *Kaumadi* argued that the appointment of Bathie was problematic because it did not make the government's decisions accountable to the Bengali public but a Supreme Court solicitor who only represented the interests of his clients, the *Dharma Sabha*. Nevertheless, with Bathie's help, the *Dharma Sabha* drafted a petition against the abolition of *Sati*. The *Sabha* did not however publish their interpretation of *Sati* in

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<sup>804</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 183.

<sup>805</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 165.

<sup>806</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 171-2.



Calcutta. This again attracted the criticism of the *Sambad Kaumadi* who commented against its secrecy and announced Rammohun's intention of going to England to present a counter petition against the *Dharma Sabha*.

Rammohun's *Anti-Suttee petition* was presented to the House of Lords and the Privy Council in July 1831. The petition claimed to represent the interests of the entire governed population of India. The emphasis on the governed population strengthened Rammohun's argument that the abolishment of *Sati* was not his personal project against the practice but constituted a core aspect of the 'obligations' of the British government to Bengali society. The petition's core argument was the British government's accountability to an ethical public in India:

That your petitioners [the natives of India] cannot permit themselves to suppose that such a practice [*Sati*] abhorrent to all feelings of nature, the obligations of society and the principles of good government will receive the sanctions of your Hon. House [...] the British name and character will be dishonoured by its re-establishment.<sup>807</sup>

Rammohun argued that legislating against *Sati* was also a practical necessity for Britain since any official sanction to unethical practices could seriously undermine its political credibility in India. This argument was further developed in Rammohun's final tract on *Sati*, *Some remarks on the vindication of the resolution passed by government of Bengal in 1829 abolishing the practice of female sacrifice in India*. The *Remarks* was addressed to Company officials, particularly a colonial anxiety that a consequence of abolishing *Sati* was political revolution by disgruntled natives against the Company.<sup>808</sup> This colonial anxiety had a lengthy historical context. As Arvind Sharma noted,

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<sup>807</sup> English Works of Rammohun Roy, ed. Ghose, 479.

<sup>808</sup> *Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 185-192.

successive Company administrations at London and Calcutta refused to legislate against *Sati* from 1787-1829 fearing a revolution from its subjects.<sup>809</sup> In this context Rammohun argued that the natives of Bengal were happy with the abolition of *Sati* and criticised colonial policy as guided by the fear of revolution and loss of empire in India than the unethical nature of *Sati*.<sup>810</sup>

In a strong continuity with the 1818 petition, the *Remarks* also outlined the possible policy of the British government regarding *Sati* and argued that the government ought to frame policies which would enable intervention to protect the welfare of its inhabitants from unethical social practices.<sup>811</sup> The consistency with which the same argument was made in two different cities, thirteen years apart shows that ideas of governance, ethics and accountability was crucial to his *Sati* writings.

Apart from Rammohun, the Court of Directors also petitioned the Privy Court against the *Dharma Sabha*:

It is *humbly submitted* on the part of the Court of Directors that this petition [of the Dharma Sabha] ought to be dismissed and the above mentioned regulation of the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1829 ought not to be disallowed or disapproved of. (Emphasis in original)<sup>812</sup>

The Court's arguments mirrored Rammohun's since they took the view that the abolishment of *Sati* would not lead to a revolution in Bengal and the practice was

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<sup>809</sup> Sharma, 'Sati', 1.

<sup>810</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 187.

<sup>811</sup> Rammohun Roy, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 187.

<sup>812</sup> *In the matter of a petition to His Majesty in Council by certain Hindoo Inhabitants of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa against a regulation made and passed by the Governor General in Council of Fort William in Bengal on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1829 declaring the practice of Sati illegal and punishable by Criminal courts. A statement humbly submitted on the part of the Court of Directors of The East India Company to His Majesty in Council in support of the above mentioned regulation* (London, 1831), 1.

rooted in domestic cruelty towards the widow and argued for state intervention beyond police protection. The Court's position marks a major shift in Company policy. The official argument seemed to have shifted from a concern with an alleged political revolution to failures in governance. The Court also painted a deeply negative picture of the natives who supported *Sati*:

In order to compel the widow in these cases to ascend the pile, personal violence, intoxication, menace and persuasion was resorted to. The utmost vigilance of the police was not always an effectual guard against the employment of even actual force [...] against every species of force whether moral or physical to which the Hindu widow was exposed to [...] it was the duty of the government [...] to afford a full, sufficient protection. Nothing short of the prohibition of the rite in all cases was adequate to this end [...]<sup>813</sup>

The endorsement by the Court of Directors to Rammohun's petition against the *Dharma Sabha* would have had an enormous impact on the Privy Councillors. Amongst the Councillors were former Governor-Generals Marquis Wellesley and Lord Amherst and the former Chairman of the Court of Directors, Charles Grant. Both Wellesley and Amherst had previously expressed an opinion against the practice of *Sati*. Rammohun Roy was present during the entire proceedings and his petition was presented to the Council for consideration.<sup>814</sup>

The Privy Council ultimately dismissed the *Dharma Sabha's* petition and decided not to revoke the act abolishing *Sati*. The Council echoed the Court of Directors petition that *Sati* constituted a serious breach of good governance and social ethics. Further, the Council argued that the abolishment of *Sati* upheld ethical systems which were as

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<sup>813</sup> *A statement on the part of the Court of Directors* (London, 1831), 6.

<sup>814</sup> *Rammohun Roy*, ed. J.K. Majumdar, 109.

much on par with the ideas of a 'Christian country' as it was with Hindu *Śāstric* law.

This was a dismissal of the argument that the Company represented an alien system of ethics in India.

The Council's judgement was greeted with relief by Rammohun. In a letter to John Poynder, a member of the court of proprietors at the East India Company who opposed *Sati*, Rammohun wrote:

[...] Hearty congratulations on the protection afforded by the Privy Council to the female community in India. They have removed the odium from our character as a people. As we can no longer be guilty of female murder, we now deserve every improvement, temporal and spiritual.<sup>815</sup>

As the letter shows, Rammohun had interpreted the decision of the Council as an effective declaration that an ethical Bengali public could henceforth legitimately hold the Company accountable for its decisions in Bengal. The Privy Council decision demonstrated the success of both strands of Rammohun's argument on social ethics and governance. First, they had acknowledged Bengali society as an ethical society and secondly, upheld the abolition of *Sati* in order to prevent misgovernance by the Company. Thus, Rammohun's political thought of governmental accountability to an ethical public had finally borne fruit after more than a decade of opposition.

## Conclusion

In sharp contrast to the views of current scholarship that Rammohun Roy's writings on *Sati* was not a part of his political thought, this chapter has shown that Rammohun's

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<sup>815</sup> *Correspondence of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Biswas, 728.

*Sati* writings articulated his political thought of social ethics and governmental accountability to a vast readership in Calcutta as well as London.

Rammohun had two distinct readers- Bengali society and Company officials. To Bengali society, Rammohun focussed on everyday practices of domestic abuse in the Bengali household to show that *Sati* was a product of the contemporary normalisation of domestic abuse and subordination of women. To Company officials, Rammohun called for governmental intervention against the practice. As the previous chapter showed, the argument for government intervention to prevent unethical social practices was a core aspect of his political thought.<sup>816</sup>

Rammohun stressed that the continuing practice of *Sati* in Bengal amounted to misgovernance and a violation of governmental 'obligations' to its subjects.<sup>817</sup>

Rammohun's conception of the 'obligations' not only referred to the political and legal rights of its subjects, but also the requirement by the government to create the conditions by which such rights could be developed such that its subjects could build an ethical society.

Although current historical scholarship argues that Rammohun did not call for government intervention in his early writings, this chapter has shown that this argument was consistently and consciously made over the thirteen years of his involvement with *Sati* (1818-31).<sup>818</sup> Rammohun stressed that government officials such as Company magistrates oft contributed to abuse by refusing to recognise the legality

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<sup>816</sup> This is the argument of chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>817</sup> The use of the term 'obligations' to subjects as a core feature of the 'principles of good government' can be found in Rammohun's *Anti Sutte petition* of 1831. English Works of Rammohun Roy, ed. Ghose, 479.

<sup>818</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas in Bengal*, 64.

of marital separations and instead coercing women to return to very households where they had been abused.

In this context, Rammohun expressed 'surprise' that the administrators knew so little of the laws and everyday lives of their subjects. Rammohun argued that government's unfamiliarity with legal traditions of Bengal and its lack of engagement with the social contexts of its subjects had led to the murder of thousands of its subjects and highlighted the urgency for government intervention by stressing the unethical nature of *Sati*.

This argument was validated in the Company's decision to abolish *Sati* in 1829 and the upheld in the ruling of the Privy Courts in London in 1831 against conservative native opposition. As Rammohun's writings in the post-abolishment period (1830-1) showed, the emphasis on ethics and social welfare and his responses to a system of governance which operated across vast distances enables us to identify the context of colonial governance and its impact on his political thought. Rammohun's ideas of *Sati* cannot be seen in isolation from the Company methods of governing Bengal from the distant city of London.

As chapter one showed, Rammohun interpreted the political stance of the East India Company as the local representative of the British government in India. This chapter has explained how Rammohun articulated this argument through his *Sati* writings arguing that the Company at Calcutta as well as the British government in London had a duty to be accountable to the natives of India and intervene in matters concerning their welfare.

An important aspect of this argument however was Rammohun's conception of ethics, Hindu and Christian, and the ways in which he was able to create a common ethical framework which reconciled both systems of thought. Rammohun conception of Christian ethics and its relationship to his ideas of reform is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter six: Rammohun's political thought and interpretation of the Gospels, c. 1820-3.

### Introduction

The previous chapter showed that Rammohun rejected all contemporary religious practices in Bengali Hindu society which contradicted his ideas of ethical social practice. It did not however focus on an important influence and source of these ideas- the Bible. This chapter argues that Rammohun's stress on ethical social practice in Hindu scripture was influenced by readings and interpretations of the Gospels of the New Testament in the Bible. The Gospels were treated as analogous to Hindu scripture. The four Gospels of the New Testament were treated as a single text by Rammohun.

Rammohun's interpretation of the Gospels has been the subject of intense historical focus. According to Torkel Brekke, 'Rammohun Roy was by all standards the most important Bengali intellectual' in the early-nineteenth century in Bengal to engage with the missionaries in Bengal.<sup>819</sup> He argues that the Baptist missionaries in Serampore in particular were important to Rammohun.<sup>820</sup> In this context, Shyamlal Chatterjee has shown that the Baptists were the 'first Christians' with whom Rammohun developed a 'personal contact'.<sup>821</sup> Although the 'contact' began in 1814, when Rammohun's first translation of Hindu scripture, the *Vedāntagrantha* was being written, we note that neither Brekke nor Chatterjee perceive Rammohun's writings on

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<sup>819</sup> Torkel Brekke, 'Baptism and Bible in Bengal', *History of Religions*, 45 (2006), 213-33.

<sup>820</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 228.

<sup>821</sup> Shyamlal Chatterjee, 'Rammohun Roy and the Baptists of Serampore: Moralism vs. Faith', 20 (1984), 669-680.



the Gospels in the context of the rest of his work, but rather as a specific example of native engagement with Christianity.<sup>822</sup>

One reason why scholars perceive Rammohun's writings on the Gospels to be separate from the rest of his work is because his writings did not refer to Hindu scripture or projects of political and social reform. Rather, Rammohun's interpretations of the Gospels were characterised by an exclusive focus on Christianity. Rammohun's first text was a selection of passages from the four Gospels of the New Testament, *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness* (1820). The *Precepts* was followed by *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1820), *Second Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1821), *Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1823) as well as an intermittently published journal, *The Brahmunical Magazine or the Missionary and the Brahmun* (1821-3). These writings constitute the key texts of Rammohun's interpretation of the Gospels.

No discussion of *Precepts*, *Appeal*, *Second Appeal*, *Final Appeal* and *Brahmunical Magazine* is complete without reference to the complicated authorship of his works. The *Precepts* was an anonymous publication and the *Appeal* was written as a third person intervention.<sup>823</sup> Rammohun only revealed his authorship in the *Second Appeal* and *Final Appeal*.<sup>824</sup> The *Brahmunical Magazine* was a pseudonymous publication by Shivaprasad Sharma and *The common basis of Hinduism and Christianity* was written

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<sup>822</sup> Chatterjee, 'Baptists of Serampore', 669.

<sup>823</sup> Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures, 1990* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1990), 117.

<sup>824</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 118-9.

under a fake name, Ram Doss.<sup>825</sup> While Rammohun's insistence on a complicated authorship renders the task of finding a common thread of political thought in his writings difficult, the works of Dermot Killingley and R.S. Sugirtharajah have provided us with an important framework within which one can appreciate the complexities in Rammohun's writings on the Gospels. Killingley and Sugirtharajah have shown that in spite of the varying perspectives of Shivaprasad Sharma and Ram Doss, it is beyond doubt that the Gospels were always interpreted as a case for ethical practice.<sup>826</sup>

Killingley and Sugirtharajah however considered Rammohun's intense engagement with the Gospels somewhat puzzling. Killingley observed that Rammohun wrote more on the Gospels than the *Vedānta* but was unable to explain why.<sup>827</sup> Sugirtharajah stressed the ethical interpretation of the Gospels as Rammohun's central concern but was at a loss to interpret why Christian ethics was crucial to a political thinker who rejected all possibilities of Christian conversion in India.<sup>828</sup>

In this chapter I will argue that much of the problems thrown up by current scholarship has to do with the limitations of the conceptual framework of their arguments.

Killingley restricts the scope of Rammohun's interpretation of the Gospels to a textual comparative survey with Unitarian and Baptist thought in Britain and Calcutta.<sup>829</sup>

Sugirtharajah locates the 'hermeneutical agenda' of Rammohun's writings in a global discourse of Christian thought (which however ignores the locality of the content of Rammohun's interpretation), Brekke and Chatterjee restrict the scope of Rammohun's

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<sup>825</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 123.

<sup>826</sup> Chatterjee, 'Baptists of Serampore', 669; Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 129. ; R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 87.

<sup>827</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 141.

<sup>828</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia*, 87.

<sup>829</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 141.

writings on the Gospels to intellectual engagements with the Baptists while Raf Gelders and Willem Derde locate Rammohun's ideas of social reform in Bengal within the language of Protestant Missionary conceptions of caste and social practice in early colonial Bengal, arguing that Rammohun's arguments against the Brahmans 'merely echoed' Protestant criticism of priests in Christian Europe.<sup>830</sup> Thus we see that the arguments of current scholarship ignore Rammohun's critique of colonial domination and the unequal relations of power between colonial officials and the native. As the first chapter showed, this is a crucial context in all of Rammohun's writings.

The lack of emphasis in current scholarship on Rammohun's critique of colonial domination and governmental accountability has led to a narrow interpretation of his writings. The chapter will show that Rammohun's interpretation of the Gospels was not a response to a wider global discourse of Christian thought but his own political project of governance and social ethics. Thus, Rammohun selectively *misinterpreted* the Gospels according to his own political thought on ethics and everyday ethical practice.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one places the interpretation of the Gospels in the context of colonial governance and section two shows how Rammohun interpreted the Gospels as texts of ethical practices and highlights the methodological and conceptual similarities between Rammohun's writings on the Bible and contemporaneous tracts on Hindu scripture. The chapter will conclude that the Gospels was integral to Rammohun's political thought.

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<sup>830</sup> Raf Gelders and Willem Derde, 'Mantras of Anti- Brahmanism: Colonial experience of Indian Intellectuals', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(2003), 4611-4617.

## Section one: The Gospels

Rammohun's writings on the Gospels always cited the missionary and Company presence in Bengal as the context of his interpretation. He argued that the Gospels must be interpreted with reference to Indian social practices and ideas. He was also critical of interpreting the Gospels as a celebration of the Company's presence in Bengal. Rammohun's views were a criticism of the missionary methods of propagating the Gospels.

In this context we note that although the relationship between the Company and the missionaries was ambiguous and often fraught with conflict, the latter were clearly appreciative of the colonial context of trade in Bengal. One missionary in particular cited the Company's successful relations in Bengal as an important factor in his decision to opt for missionary work. In 1792, William Carey, a Baptist preacher in England opined that 'commerce shall subserve the spread of the Gospel'.<sup>831</sup> Carey would eventually found the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in Serampore in 1800.<sup>832</sup> With reference to the East India Company, Carey opined that missionaries and Company officials had much in common- both endured hardship in Bengal and were members of institutions with well-defined goals and charters. Carey opined that if missionary work was analogous to that of the Company in Bengal, Baptist success was guaranteed. According to Brekke, this meant that the Baptists celebrated the relationship between trade and missionary activity.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> As quoted in Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 215.

<sup>832</sup> Siddiq Khan, 'William Carey and the Serampore Books: 1800-1834', *International Library Review*, 11 (1961), 197-280.

<sup>833</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 215.

The Baptist celebration of colonial power in Bengal was consistently rejected in Rammohun's writings. The most developed form of this argument was in the *Brahmunical Magazine* (which ran four issues from 1821-23). The *Magazine* was written under a pseudonym, Shivaprasad Sharma who declared in the very first issue: [I publish this issue so that] they [the Baptist missionaries] may at least learn from experience a lesson of charity which they are ready enough to inculcate upon others overlooking at the same time the precept given by their God, 'Do unto others as you would wish to be done by' implying that if you wish others to treat your religion respectfully you should not throw offensive reflections upon the religion of others.<sup>834</sup>

The *Magazine* strongly asserted that an *inevitable* consequence of the political presence of the Company in Bengal was that the Gospels *too* were perceived by the natives as a representative of violent political change and social disorder:

Were the missionaries [...] to preach the Gospel [...] in countries not conquered by the English [...] they would be esteemed as a body of men truly zealous in propagating Christianity. [However] in Bengal [where] the English are the sole rulers and the mere name of an Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of [native] inhabitants cannot be viewed in the eyes of God as a justifiable act.<sup>835</sup>

This was an important critique against the presence of the missionaries and the propagation of the Bible in Bengal. The Company was based in London. The Gospels were rooted in social and cultural practices located in Europe. In the final analysis, this context dominated his ideas of the political context of the Gospels in Bengal. The emphasis on the political context of the Bible also highlighted the reasonableness of

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<sup>834</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 171.

<sup>835</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 137.

Rammohun's idea that the Gospels should be interpreted as a general argument for ethics than a religious doctrine. Rammohun's focus on Company violence and military conquest indicated that he perceived the Gospels as a tool of colonialism in Bengal.

Rammohun argued that the missionaries had purposefully ignored the social environment in which they were propagating their ideas of Christianity and omitted to take into account the opinions of the natives. Rammohun's argument was based on a contemporary context. As Killingley has noted, all Christian missionaries in early-nineteenth century Bengal, 'regarded themselves as bringing enlightenment to a benighted world and tended to ignore the indigenous tradition that it had nothing of value'.<sup>836</sup> Rammohun argued that claims of the superiority of Biblical doctrine over Hindu scripture was more indicative of the Company's military suzerainty over India than the text itself:

For a period upwards of fifty years [1765(?)] this country (Bengal) has been in the exclusive possession of the English nation, during the first thirty years of which [1765(?)-95(?)] from their word and deed it was universally believed that they would not interfere with the religion of their subjects and that they truly wished every man to act in such matters according to the dictates of his conscience. Their possessions in Hindustan and their political strength have through the grace of God gradually increased. But during the last twenty years [1801-21], a body of English gentlemen have been publicly endeavouring in several ways to convert Hindus and Muslims of this country into Christianity.<sup>837</sup>

According to Rammohun, the process by which the Company established political sovereignty was *the* political context of the Gospels in Bengal. He argued that

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<sup>836</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 108.

<sup>837</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 137.

progressive dissemination of the Bible was linked with the establishment of the Company as a sovereign power in India (1765-93).<sup>838</sup> Rammohun explained this by drawing attention to two phases of Company policy: first, the period between the acquisition of the *Dewani* and the Permanent Settlement (1765-93); and second, the consequences of the act of 1813.

The phases were demarcated to highlight the importance of a specific policy. The first phase followed a policy of non-intervention in religious affairs of the natives and the second phase witnessed the intervention of the missionaries. Thus the second phase was a marked contrast to the first. This contrast is an important context for Rammohun's point that the methods by which the Bible was propagated by the missionaries was overly aggressive:

The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions and abusing and ridiculing gods and saints of the former. The second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives or in public roads to preach the Excellency of their own religion and the debasedness of that of the others. The third way is that if any natives of low origin become Christians from the desire of gain, or from other motives, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example.<sup>839</sup>

The contrast between the phases was to highlight the patent unreasonableness of missionary methods to propagate the Bible and argue that the current methods were harmful to the social stability of Bengal. Rammohun's emphasis on the non-interventionist phase was not simply a part of the narrative of Company rule. Rather,

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<sup>838</sup> Penelope Carson, *East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858* (Woodbridge, 2012), 2.

<sup>839</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 137.

non-intervention in the religious affairs of the natives was the *objective* of the discussion. By highlighting that the policy of non- intervention had been followed for a longer period of time, Rammohun was able to demonstrate that *his* argument presented a stronger case.

Rammohun's argument is supported by the work of Penelope Carson.<sup>840</sup> Carson argues that the religious policy of the Company could be divided into three distinct phases.<sup>841</sup> The first phase (1640- 1793) represented a lengthy period of non-interference in religious affairs of the natives of India which was formalised as a policy in the Permanent Settlement in 1793.<sup>842</sup>

In the second phase (1794-1813) the Company faced criticism from the British public for its non-interference policy. When the Company responded to this criticism and planned to send missionaries to India, influential officials such as the Governor-General of Bengal, Lord Cornwallis, rejected them. Cornwallis's successor, John Shore even wrote to the Court of Directors that the 'clergy in Bengal were not respectable'.<sup>843</sup> This stalemate between Calcutta and London reached its climax in 1812, the year before the renewal of the Company's charter.

The year 1813 marked beginning of the third phase. By this time, the Company found itself under immense pressure to promote Christianity from the public sphere in London. The Houses of Parliament received more than 908 petitions containing more than half a million signatures from the British religious public and missionaries.<sup>844</sup>

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<sup>840</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 2.

<sup>841</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 2-3.

<sup>842</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 21.

<sup>843</sup> Khan, 'William Carey', 210.

<sup>844</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 3.



Ultimately the Company committed to ‘the religious improvement of its subjects’ in India due to public pressure.<sup>845</sup> That Rammohun was clearly aware of this context can be seen from the fact that the *Precepts* was also published in London and *Second Appeal* and *Final Appeal* were addressed to the British public.

In this context, we note that the British public’s criticism of the religious policy of the Company was also an argument about government and the basis of the legitimacy of the Company’s government in India. Objectors to the Company’s policy of non-interference argued that the Company’s religious policy amounted to bad governance.<sup>846</sup> The theme of bad governance was also an important strand in Rammohun’s arguments. To explain his argument, Rammohun singled out the Gospels in the New Testament from the text of the Bible and argued that the Gospels were primarily texts of ethics and law. This point is explored in detail in the next section.

## **Section two: The Gospels as a text of ethics and law**

The *Precepts* is the earliest example of the treatment of the Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible as a texts of social ethics for Hindu and Muslim Bengali society. Rammohun argued that references to God in the Gospels could be reconceptualised as a sovereign who governed his subjects by providing for a peaceful society through a legal system which promoted ethical practice.<sup>847</sup> In Rammohun’s interpretation, the Gospels became an argument for accountability, ethics and good government:

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<sup>845</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 2.

<sup>846</sup> Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 3.

<sup>847</sup> *The English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose (Calcutta, 1982), 555.

[...] a simple code and well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society.<sup>848</sup>

A closer look at the language in which the above passage is written shows references to governmental vocabulary such as codes and regulations. Thus Rammohun did not refer to Christianity as an ecclesiastical doctrine as much as a legal tradition. The *Precepts* was also an argument for the governance of the self through ethical social practices and a case for a system of law based on such practices. This can be seen in Rammohun's argument that the 'principal strength' of Christianity was 'a due estimation of the law'.<sup>849</sup> This argument was justified by quotes from the Gospels:

Mathew, ch. vii. Verse 12: 'Therefore all things whatever that men should do to you, do ye on to them; for this is the law of the prophets' ch. v. verse 17: 'Think not that I come to destroy the law or the prophets; I come not to destroy but to fulfil'. Luke ch. x. beginning with verse 25: 'and behold a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him saying, 'Master what I shall do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him: What is written unto the law? How reatest thou? He answering said. Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and all they strength and all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he [Jesus] said to him: Thou hast answered right. Do this and thou shalt live.'<sup>850</sup>

Rammohun's reference to the dialogue between Christ and the lawyer highlighted two important arguments: first, that everyday ethical practices constituted the core of ideas of law in Abrahamic systems of thought and second, that Christ himself formalised contemporary ethical practices into a systematic framework of law.

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<sup>848</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 547.

<sup>849</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 483.

<sup>850</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 550.

Thus the *Precepts* showed that the process of law making from contemporary social practices legitimised Christianity as a religious system.<sup>851</sup> Further, Rammohun argued that Christ legitimatised everyday ethical practices as law by borrowing from a specific epistemology of law and social practice (such as by referring to the 'laws' of previous 'prophets'). By focusing on Christ as a lawmaker and a promoter of ethical practice Rammohun could argue that a legitimate law was that which reflected ethical practice:

Had any other religious doctrine been requisite to teach men the road to peace and happiness, Jesus could not have pronounced to the lawyer, 'Do this and thou shalt live'. It was characteristic of the office of Christ to teach men that ceremonies were useless tokens of respect for God, compared with the essential proof of obedience and love towards him evidenced by the practice of beneficence towards other creatures.<sup>852</sup>

As Shayamlal Chatterjee has shown, the perspective of the *Precepts* as a text of ethics contradicted the missionary interpretation of the Bible in Bengal as a text of miracles.<sup>853</sup> Chatterjee also asserts that an emphasis on miracles was the dominant interpretation of the Bible during this period. Rammohun systematically rejected current Biblical interpretation in *Appeal*, *Second Appeal* and *Final Appeal* to support his own point of view by arguing that the emphasis on Biblical miracles diverted attention from the ethical ('moral') content of the Gospels and duly proposed a 'separation' between 'moral' practices of the Bible and 'other matters' such as rites and rituals.

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<sup>851</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia*, 85. Sugirtharajah concluded from a textual analysis of Rammohun's Biblical writings that treated the four gospels as the New Testament 'as one' rather than separate textual traditions.

<sup>852</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 550-2.

<sup>853</sup> Chatterjee, 'Baptists of Sserampore', 669.

‘Moral’ did not however refer to a particular system of Christian ethics but a general case for ethics in society:

The sense in which the word ‘moral’ is used is quite general and applied equally to our conduct in religious and civil matters.<sup>854</sup>

Rammohun explained Biblical miracles as narrative tools of legitimisation which established the ‘authority of the teacher’, Christ rather than as historical events:

Had [Christ’s] doctrines of themselves made their due impression, the aid of miracles would not have been requisite or made recourse to.<sup>855</sup>

Rammohun also warned the dangerous consequences of debates over the nature of Christ’s miracles by arguing that they had historically led to wars and conflicts over differing interpretations of the Bible. This had severely hampered the political and social stability of the regions under the sway of Christianity:

I humbly entreat anyone to refer to the numerous volumes written by persons unattached to any of the established churches against the miracles and some of the dogmas of history and some of the dogmas of Christianity. It has been the different interpretations of dogmas that have given rise to such keen disputes among the followers of Jesus. They have not only destroyed the harmony and union between one sect of Christians and another and continue to do so; but in the past have caused continual wars and frequent bloodshed amongst them [...]

A slight reference to the history of Christian countries will I trust afford to my readers entire conviction upon this head.<sup>856</sup>

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<sup>854</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 560.

<sup>855</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 555.

<sup>856</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 556.

Rammohun argued that the prevalence of wars contradicted Christ's emphasis on law, social stability and peaceful government and that social conflict was the likely consequence of preaching miracles. Both arguments effectively denounced the current interpretation of the Bible and paved the way for his argument for social ethics:

[...] Truth, charity and liberality are essential to Christianity in every sense of the word [...] The following sentiments of the compiler [Rammohun] are found in the introduction [of the Precepts]: A notion of the existence of the supreme, superintending power, the author and preserver of the harmonious system who organised and who regulates such an infinity of celestial and terrestrial objects and a due estimation of that which teaches that man should do unto others as he should wish to be done by.<sup>857</sup>

In this context, the reference to the Biblical dictum of 'do unto others' suggests that Rammohun based his ideas of social ethics on the concept of everyday practices (such as charity). The influence of the Bible on Rammohun's thought was then generalised. The *Precepts* did not cite any contemporary influences or affiliation to a particular theological perspective. Instead, Rammohun presented an argument for 'common sense':

Voluminous works written by learned men of particular sects for the purpose of establishing truth, consistency, rationality and the priority of their own particular doctrines contain such variety of arguments that I cannot hope to adduce here any new reasonings of sufficient novelty and force to attract the attention of my readers. Besides, in matters of religion, particularly men in general through prejudice and partiality to the opinions they once form pay little or no attention to the sentiments (however unreasonable they may be) and often turn a

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<sup>857</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 547-8.

deaf ear to what is most consistent with the laws of nature and conformable to the dictates of human reason and divine revelation.<sup>858</sup>

Rammohun's perspective of a non-sectarian viewpoint however was not entirely accurate. As Killingley observed, Rammohun had 'allied' with the Unitarian school of thought in Calcutta by 1824 and even founded a 'Unitarian Society' in 1828.<sup>859</sup>

Killingley argued that Rammohun's association with the Unitarians is not surprising since his ideas of the Bible were very similar to their interpretation.<sup>860</sup> (For example, the Unitarians also stressed on ethical practices as a form of worshipping one invisible God.)<sup>861</sup> So, even by arguing from within a Unitarian tradition, Rammohun could confidently assert that:

It is however too true to be denied that the Compiler [Rammohun] of those moral Precepts [of Jesus] separated them from some of the dogmas and other matters [miracles] chiefly under the supposition that they alone were sufficient to secure the peace and happiness of mankind at large, a position that is entirely founded on and supported by the express authorities of Jesus of Nazareth, a denial of which would imply a total disavowal of Christianity.<sup>862</sup>

We note however that an adherence to this perspective would have contradicted the purpose of Rammohun's engagement with Unitarianism. Unitarian missionaries were also aware of this context. For instance, William Adam, Unitarian missionary and Rammohun's collaborator, opined that his ideas diverged significantly from Unitarian philosophy.<sup>863</sup> Adam's observations were in response to Rammohun's view that the

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<sup>858</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 484.

<sup>859</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 129-38.

<sup>860</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 132.

<sup>861</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia*, 87.

<sup>862</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 550-2.

<sup>863</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 145-6.

interpretation of the Gospels as a source of social ethics could contribute to an important public discussion on ethical practice and the legitimacy of current social practices in Bengal.

The Unitarians were not Rammohun's only point of contact with Christian thought. Rammohun had worked with the Baptist missionaries to translate the New Testament into Bengali from 1814 onwards.<sup>864</sup> His close association with the Anglicans, Baptists and Unitarians however created problems in Bengali society where Christianity was looked upon with a degree of suspicion. Worse still, the Baptists had also touted Rammohun as a potential convert in 1815-6.<sup>865</sup>

In view of this, it is not surprising that the *Precepts* was an anonymous publication. As an anonymous author, he was able to divert attention away from public suspicion of his Christian connections and argue to an intended readership in Bengali society that everyday social ethics constituted the essence of the teachings of Christ. Authorial anonymity was thus crucial to the success of Rammohun's political project.

Rammohun was also of the opinion that this was the most reasonable interpretation of the Gospels since:

It is [...] plainly stated to us that but a very small portion of the works of Jesus have been handed down to us [...] John says at the conclusion of his gospel, ch. xxi, ver. 25, 'If every one of the things that Jesus did were written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books'.<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 230.

<sup>865</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 228.

<sup>866</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 555.

Rammohun was not only pointing out problems with the content of the Gospels.

Rather, his emphasis on the limitations of Biblical scripture highlighted the importance of local context in the interpretation of the Bible. To Rammohun, the methods of propagation of the Bible in Bengal was problematic because the missionaries refused to acknowledge that the Bible did not reflect the practices of the Bengali society:

The compiler [Rammohun] has been residing in the same spot for upwards of twenty years [1800-20] where European gentlemen and others [...] have [also] been [residing]. They distribute numberless copies of the complete Bible written in different languages amongst the natives but in vain. The [missionaries] have been so incautious and inconsiderate in their attempts to enlighten the natives of India as to address the [Biblical] instruction to them in the same way as if reasoning with people brought up in a Christian country with dogmatical notions imbibed from their infancy.<sup>867</sup>

Rammohun's reference to 'dogmas' and 'dogmatic notions' referred to the missionary ignorance of perspectives which were socially embedded in European practices. In this context, we note that the Baptists also suffered from the continuous social hostility towards their ideas. We note for example, Joshua Marshman's account of the grave impact of native hostility on Carey's colleague, John Thomas. Thomas became so 'frantic with joy' with a case of native conversion that it 'destroyed the balance of his mind'. Thomas eventually had to be physically confined where he 'raved'. And as Brekke points out, Thomas was not the only casualty of a hostile Bengali society since Carey's wife had also 'lost her mind' by this time.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>867</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

<sup>868</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 217.



The Baptists' hardships did not pay off as Carey had initially expected. New converts were often confused about Baptist practices. For example, converts often confused Baptism with the Hindu practice of ritualistic immersion in water to 'wash away sins'.<sup>869</sup> Even Carey was at a loss explain the practice of Baptism by water to the Bengali population. In this context, the *Precepts* presented three cases in which the Bible had led to confused and ultimately flawed conversions amongst the Bengali population. The first case concerned a former convert from the Muslim community in Bengal, Inayat Khan. Khan, 'a man of respectable family', had initially converted to Christianity but later 'speedily returned to Muhammadanism pleading that he had been unable to reconcile his understanding to certain dogmas preached to him' by the missionaries.<sup>870</sup>

The second case concerned an elite convert, Jawad Sabat. Sabat was 'an Arab traveller, translator and scholar' who had been in Serampore from 1807-13. Sabat had been sent by the Senior Chaplain of Madras to the Baptists as a *Munshi* to assist in the translation of the Bible. According to Siddiq Khan, Sabat inaugurated 'a furious controversy' in Bengali society by publishing 'an obnoxious tract' on the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>871</sup> In response, the Governor-General Lord Minto restricted the areas in Calcutta where the Baptists could preach.<sup>872</sup>

In this context, Rammohun opined that Sabat was 'a grossly unprincipled Arab' but 'eminently learned' and noted that after his disillusionment with Christianity, Sabat had expressed his disagreement by printing 'several hundred copies of a treatise in

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<sup>869</sup> Brekke, 'Bible in Bengal', 217.

<sup>870</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

<sup>871</sup> Khan, 'William Carey', 226.

<sup>872</sup> Khan, 'William Carey', 226.

Arabic' against the missionaries.<sup>873</sup> While both Sabat and Inayat Khan were Muslims, Rammohun's third case concerned the Hindu population in Bengal:

About three years ago [1819], the Compiler [Rammohun] on a visit to an English gentleman resident at Calcutta saw a great number of [native] Christian converts with a petition they intended to present to the highest ecclesiastical authority [the Bishop of Calcutta] stating that their teachers [missionaries] through false promises of [material] advancement had induced them to give up their own religion.<sup>874</sup>

Rammohun then described his 'indignation' at the charge against the missionaries and opined that the allegations were unfounded since they appeared to be led by 'unprincipled' native converts. The stress on 'unprincipled' converts indicated that the missionaries themselves misunderstood the motivations of the natives:

Regarding the few hundred natives [in Bengal] who have been nominally converted to Christianity [...] there is reason to suspect that the greater number of them may have been allured to change their faith by other attractions than by a truth and conviction of the reasonableness of the dogmas as we find nearly all of them fed up with their spiritual teachers [missionaries] and in the case of neglect are apt to manifest a rebellious spirit.<sup>875</sup>

In this case, the applicability of Rammohun's interpretation of the Gospels as a general argument for ethics can be seen in context. Rammohun's interpretation would not lead to the sort of confusions which Inayat Khan and Sabat had experienced. Neither would it give any scope to 'unprincipled' native converts to take advantage of the Bible for creating social instability. Further, unlike the missionaries, Rammohun had

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<sup>873</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

<sup>874</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

<sup>875</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

interpreted the Gospels in the context of their applicability to the specific social and religious dynamics of India itself:

Hindustan is a country of which nearly three fifths of the inhabitants are Hindus and two fifths Mussalmans. The latter portion are firmly devoted to the belief in one God which has been instilled in their minds from their infancy. The former (I mean the Hindus) are with a few exceptions immersed in gross idolatry and in the belief of the most extravagant description respecting futurity, antiquity and the miracles of their deities and saints as handed down to them from their ancient books.<sup>876</sup>

Rammohun's assessment of 'Hindustan' in terms of Hinduism and Islam (representing 'gross idolatry' and 'belief in in one God' respectively) highlighted the locality of his interpretation of the Gospels. Rammohun stressed that *his* interpretation correctly assessed Indian social conditions, while the Christian missionaries' did not.

In this context, if we compare the three cases of conversion referred to earlier, we recall that Inayat Khan and Sabat were Muslims and reconverted to Islam from Christianity since neither were able to 'reconcile the dogmas' preached by the missionaries and were confused about how the concept of the Trinity could possibly relate to 'the belief in one invisible God'.<sup>877</sup> For Khan and Sabat, the missionary interpretation of the Bible was problematic since it led to irreconcilable doctrinal implications. Rammohun noted that the case of the Hindu converts was different from Sabat and Khan. This is because contemporary Hindu doctrines of multiple gods or idols were perfectly compatible with missionary ideas of trinity. To emphasise this,

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<sup>876</sup>*English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 560.

<sup>877</sup>*English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 557.

Rammohun compared the Biblical miracle of Jesus walking on water with myths popular in contemporary Bengal:

In [Bengal] miracles indefinitely more wonderful are related [...] of gods and saints on authorities that the Hindus must deem superior to those of the apostles [of the New Testament]. Agastya [the mythical Hindu saint] is famed for having swallowed the ocean, when it gave him offence and having restored it by urinary evacuation.<sup>878</sup>

Yet, the Hindu converts protested against their conversion. This was not therefore a consequence of doctrinal confusion but a regrettable lack of ‘principles’ or ethics. For Rammohun, this case highlighted the urgent need for a general ethical discourse in contemporary Hindu society.

Rammohun’s point was that the Gospels could contribute to a discourse of social ethics in contemporary Bengali society if it was seen as:

[...] moral doctrines, tending evidently to the maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large which are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion and intelligible alike to the learned and the unlearned. I cannot but hope the best effects from the promulgation in the present form.<sup>879</sup>

The ‘best effects’ of the *Precepts* was its discussion of welfare and law within the conceptual framework of religion. Through this text, Rammohun argued that religion was a doctrine which emphasised the relations of equality among members of society against all forms of illegitimate regulation and control:

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<sup>878</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 484.

<sup>879</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 483.

As religion consists in a code of duties which the creature believes he owes to his creator, it must be considered presumptuous and unjust for one man to attempt to interfere with the religious observances of others, for which he well knows, he is not held responsible by any law, either human or divine. Notwithstanding if mankind is brought into existence, and by nature formed to enjoy the comforts of society and the pleasures of an improved mind, they may be justified in opposing any system, religious, domestic, or political, which is inimical to the happiness or calculated to debase the human intellect.<sup>880</sup>

Thus the *Precepts* justified Rammohun's project of social reform of religious, domestic and political practice in Bengal. It showed that Rammohun was not simply articulating his perception of an ideal society but rather arguing that the current instability of social and political relations only necessitated social reform. The *Final Appeal* developed this idea further. The Bible was seen as the 'source for civil law' and the basis on which systems of governance had historically evolved in England.

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Rammohun's writings on the Bible were not preachy monologues directed at the Bengali public but dramatic controversies in the form of debates with William Carey, William Ward and Joshua Marshman, members of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).<sup>881</sup>

The BMS being based at Serampore, a Danish colony, enjoyed certain advantages over other missionary groups in Bengal. The Company had limited control over the Serampore missionary activities since they enjoyed the protection of the Danish Crown. In the context of this chapter, this referred to the Company's inability to

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<sup>880</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 550.

<sup>881</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 107.

regulate the BMS printing press. Almost immediately after arriving in Bengal in 1793, Carey conceptualised the printing press as the main vehicle for the dissemination of the BMS' ideas.<sup>882</sup> The BMS published more than 220,000 volumes of translations or selected tracts of the Bible in 40 oriental languages from 1801-31. Carey's conception of printing was not however restricted to 'religious publication' but also encompassed 'Indian classics, grammars, vocabularies, dictionaries, maps' and journals of political and social events.<sup>883</sup> The BMS were thus a formidable publishing house. Along with their ideas of the Bible, their printing press was a special point of note for Rammohun. Although some biographers (such as Sophia Collet) opined that Rammohun did not expect the Baptists to respond angrily to his writings, recent scholarship has largely shown these views to be incorrect. Killingley argues that since the *Precepts* purposefully rejected core Baptist doctrines such as atonement, doctrine of trinity and divinity of Christ and belief in Biblical miracles, it follows that Rammohun *intended* to provoke a response from the Baptists.<sup>884</sup> As Rammohun wrote:

I feel persuaded that by separating from other matters contained in the New Testament the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasion. For historical and some other passages are liable to disputes [...] especially miraculous [stories of Jesus] which are much less wonderful than the fabricated tales handed down to the native of Asia and [...] carry little weight with them.<sup>885</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Khan, 'William Carey', 229.

<sup>883</sup> Khan, 'William Carey', 229.

<sup>884</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 141.

<sup>885</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Ghose, 484.

Rammohun's criticism had the desired effect. The Baptists 'viciously attacked' the *Precepts* (and Rammohun's response to the Baptist 'attack' was the context in which *Appeal*, *Second Appeal*, *Final Appeal* and *Brahmunical Magazine* were written.) Joshua Marshman of the BMS was at the frontline of the Baptist response to Rammohun.<sup>886</sup> Marshman identified Rammohun as the author of the *Precepts* and perceived his ideas to be that of a 'heathen' Hindu than a Unitarian Christian. Thus, Marshman authenticated the authorship and perspective of the *Precepts*.

Current scholarship does not consider the reasons why Rammohun chose to be anonymous. In this context, we argue that Rammohun debated anonymously with the Baptist missionaries so that the latter could legitimate his perspective as that of a Hindu and remove all doubt of the author as being a potential Christian convert. Once his own position as a Hindu was clear, Rammohun clarified his authorship and proceeded to introduce changes in the debate by shifting its focus from a discussion on Christian theology to his own political project of introducing a general discourse of social ethics in Bengal. Consider for example his response to Marshman in *Second Appeal*:

If Christianity inculcated a doctrine which represents God as consisting of three persons and appearing sometimes in the human form, at other times in bodily shape like a dove; no Hindu in my humble opinion who searches for truth can conscientiously profess it in preference to Hinduism; for what renders the modern Hindu system of religion absurd and detestable is that it presents the divine nature though one (*Ek Brahman*) as consisting of many people capable of assuming different forms for the discharge of different offices. I am, however, most firmly

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<sup>886</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 107.

convinced that Christianity is entirely free from every trace of polytheism whether gross or refined. I therefore enjoy the approbation of my conscience in publishing the *Precepts* of this religion as the source of peace and happiness.<sup>887</sup>

Rammohun argued that if the 'absurdity' of Hinduism was its rituals and beliefs in multiple manifestations of one God (*Ek Brahman*), the ideas of Trinitarianism only consolidated such 'absurdity' with a fresh set of rituals and practices. The *Precepts* on the other hand clarified the importance of ethics in contemporary Hindu society by shaping an understanding of the Hindu cosmological universe of *Ek Brahman*.

The *Precepts'* argument influenced Rammohun's textual interpretation far beyond the hermeneutical reach of the New Testament. Ultimately, as a result of his lengthy writings on the Bible, Rammohun was not only able to draw attention to his ideas of ethics to readers in Bengal but also show these ideas could also apply in interpretations of Hindu social practices.

The *Precepts* could not however be cited as an authoritative source in tracts on Hindu scripture. Instead Rammohun referred to a known scriptural authority, Vyasa, the ancient author of the *Mahābhārata* to establish the legitimacy of his interpretation of Hindu scripture and located his argument for ethics through Vyasa.

Consider for example *Apology for the pursuit of final beatitude independent of Brahmunical observances* published the same year as the *Precepts*. The *Apology* was a short tract on the importance of understanding Hindu religion ('a knowledge of God') as separate from rituals.

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<sup>887</sup>English Works of Rammohun Roy, ed. Ghose, 675.



We can by no means admit the necessity of observing duties and rites [in the *Vedas* and other *Śāstras*] as indispensable steps towards attaining divine knowledge [...] for the great Vyasa in his work on *Vedānta* (or the explanation of the spiritual parts of the *Vedas*) justifies the attainment of the knowledge of God even by those who never intend to practice the prescribed rites and practices.<sup>888</sup>

The recourse to Vyasa can also be seen in *Translation of a Sanskrit tract*. As chapter three showed, the *Translation* was primarily written in response to the criticism by Sivnath Shastri that while the ancient law books or *Śāstras* advocated idol worship as a core practice in Hinduism, Rammohun argued the opposite.<sup>889</sup> Rammohun attempted to prove that the reinterpretation of Hindu religion as everyday ethical practice did not in fact ignore the *Śāstras* by first citing a passage which apparently advocated idol worship:

Men shall worship [...] the Lord of the Universe by means of an image or any other form during the intervals of leisure from the performances of the ritual observances prescribed for the class to which he belongs until he becomes conscious that I [God] dwell in all human beings.<sup>890</sup>

Rammohun then argued that merely citing passages from the *Śāstras* without considering the interpretations of ancient commentators could lead to a misunderstanding. He noted that the above passage had been interpreted by Vyasa as follows:

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<sup>888</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman (Calcutta, ii, 1946), 123.

<sup>889</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 197.

<sup>890</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 197.

This verse shows that worship by the means of an idol or any other form is not absolutely useless. [Thus] the passage [on idol worship quoted above] limits the period of idol worship and explains what practices are its necessary accompaniments.<sup>891</sup>

Rammohun articulated ideas of ethics as a part of the core tradition of Hinduism, demolished the veracity of idol worship and legitimised his conception of what constituted ethical practice or ‘two main forms of worship’ by citing these ideas through Vyasa:

The first [form of worship] consists of meditation on a soul of divine origin. A continuation of such meditation is believed to have a tendency to rescue the soul from all human feelings and passions and thereby the soul is brought to its original divine perfection for surpassing both human search and description. This is the state which is commonly called absorption. The devotees who adhere to this form of devotion being naturally incapable of committing any moral or social crime are not subjected to the precepts and prohibitions found in the *Śāstras*. The second kind of devotion consists of believing that the Deity is possessed of all attributes of perfection. This class of devotees practice charity towards others.<sup>892</sup>

Rammohun’s interpretation of Vyasa was very similar to his argument in *Precepts*. For example, Rammohun’s emphasis on charity as a religious practice can also be found in the *Precepts* as one of the core traditions of Christianity. The *Apology* also extended the conceptual scope of the *Precepts*’ argument and emphasised the connection between individual ethics and social practice through references to prevention of crime:

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<sup>891</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 197.

<sup>892</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy* ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 197.

The great Vyasa has said: the sacred tradition declares that a person studying the *Gītā* alone had acquired final beatitude stands unshaken.<sup>893</sup>

As Arvind Sharma has shown, the *Gītā* was a popular text in contemporary Bengal.

Rammohun also referred to the *Gītā* in tracts against the practice of *Sati*, arguing that the *Gītā* was a text which conceptualised religion as everyday ethical practice.<sup>894</sup>

While the *Apology* emphasised that reinterpreting religion as ethics was entirely consistent with Early-Indian Hindu scripture, Rammohun's next tract, *Universal Religion* (1820) highlighted the socially disruptive role of rituals and rites in contemporary Bengali society. *Universal Religion* asserted that rituals and rites led to conflicts and social instability in Bengal. Rammohun argued for the removal of the rituals in contemporary Bengali society. This argument was crucial to the success of his political project. Thus is because rituals had been traditionally seen as a form of worship and their absence meant that the idea of worship could now be reconceptualised. The passage below shows that Rammohun used the word 'worship' to mean ethical practice:

[...] in this worship, it is indispensably necessary to endeavour to direct the will and the senses and the conduct [of the individual in society] in such a manner as not only to prevent our own or other's ill but to secure our own or other's good; in fact what is considered injurious to ourselves should be avoided to others.<sup>895</sup>

We note that Rammohun's idea of 'what is considered injurious to ourselves should be avoided to others' is a restatement of the Biblical dictum 'do unto others and you

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<sup>893</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 124.

<sup>894</sup> Arvind Sharma, 'The *Gita*, Sutttee and Rammohun Roy', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 20 (1983), 345.

<sup>895</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 131.

would be done by' which had been highlighted in the *Precepts* as one of the central teachings of Christ. Our discussion of the *Translation* and *Apology* shows that the *Precepts* can be read as a tacit acknowledgement of the importance of Christian institutions on Rammohun's ideas of ethics in Bengali Hindu society.

Further evidence for this argument can be found in *Answers of a Hindu to the question of why he frequents Unitarian places of Worship* (1823). *Answers* was a pseudonymous tract (bearing the name of one of Rammohun's associates, Chandrasekhar Dev) which argued that repeated visits to a Unitarian church could clarify Rammohun's interpretations of Hindu scripture as a discourse of ethical practice legitimised by the belief in one God: <sup>896</sup>

[A] Church reminds [a] Hindu of one immutable being, omnipresent and omnipotent. Because the prayers read, worship offered and sermons preached in the Unitarian place of worship remind me of the infinitely wise ruler of this infinite universe without ascribing to him [any] other attributes. In my plain understanding it can comprehend the idea of fellow creatures and is incapable of forming a notion of one or more fellow creators each equally possessed of omnipotence or omnipresence. <sup>897</sup>

Rammohun argued that the institution of the church in Bengal clarified contemporary Hindu ideas of worship as ethical practice and that a degree of universality could be observed in Christianity and Hinduism when divinity was conceptualised as one God. This was elaborated in *Universal Religion* which emphasised on an even broader practice of ethics and the belief in one God:

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<sup>896</sup> Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 124.

<sup>897</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 193.

In China, Tartary [Turkey (?)], in Europe and in all the other countries where so many sects exist all believe that the object they believe that the object whom they adore to be the author and the governor of the universe, consequently they must also acknowledge according to their own faith that this worship is their own.<sup>898</sup>

In this context we note that Rammohun ignored the role of religious or ecclesiastical authorities even though his main critics were Sanskrit *Pandits* (Sivnath Shastri and Mrityunjay Vidyalkar) as well as the Serampore Baptists (Joshua Marshman). The exclusion however was not an oversight but deliberate. Rammohun was deeply critical of the role of religious authorities in overseeing and legitimising rites and rituals. In this context *Answers* even compared Hindu religious authorities with Christian missionaries:

I already feel weary of the doctrine of 'Man-God' or 'God-man' frequently inculcated by the Brahmins in pursuance of their corrupt traditions: the same doctrine of Man-God though preached by another body of priests, better dressed, better provided for and eminently elevated by the virtue of conquest cannot effectually tend to excite my anxiety or curiosity to listen to it.<sup>899</sup>

The above passage shows that the manner in which the conceptual architecture of an argument regarding Christian practice was supplanted in another context.

Rammohun's 'weariness' with Christian missionaries and his critique of the divinity of Christ as an interpretation of Christianity highlighted another context, the social position of the Brahmin in Bengal. His writings on Christianity and Hindu scripture stressed that the right to supervise and conduct rituals translated to the exercise of

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<sup>898</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 131.

<sup>899</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 193.

disproportionate power which eventually led to unethical practices in society. As the previous chapters have shown, Rammohun consistently presented contemporary Brahminical influence on Bengali society to be illegitimate and unethical.

## Conclusion

The *Precepts, Appeals* and the *Brahmunical Magazine* were rooted in the political context of the Company in Bengal. Given this background, Rammohun argued that the Gospels required to be radically reinterpreted as an ethical doctrine if Christianity was to play a positive role in Bengali society.

Rammohun's critic, the Baptist missionary Joshua Marshman was aware of the Gospels' importance to Rammohun's political project. Marshman read the *Precepts* alongside Rammohun's interpretations of Hindu scripture and concluded that he was attempting to relate Christianity to Hinduism. To Marshman, Rammohun's interpretation of the Bible was problematic *precisely because* he refused to write from within an exclusively Christian tradition. These ideas can be found in Rammohun's response to Marshman:

I find to my great surprise and concern, in a small tract lately issued from the missionary presses and distributed by missionary gentlemen, direct charges of atheism have been made against the doctrines of the *Vedas* and undeserved reflections on us, the followers.<sup>900</sup>

Marshman rejected Rammohun's project of reconceptualising religion as ethics through his assessment of atheism in Hindu scripture. Rammohun criticised Marshman for having failed to convince the natives of the importance of Christianity

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<sup>900</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 171.

and acknowledge the Bible's status in Bengal as a representative of unfamiliar social practices:

I was influenced by the conviction that persons who travel to a distant country for the purpose of overturning the opinions of its inhabitants and introducing their own ought to be prepared to demonstrate the superiority of the latter to the former.<sup>901</sup>

Rammohun was not mocking Marshman. Rather Rammohun's conceptualisation of the Bible as a text of British cultural practices was a case for the reasonableness of his argument of interpreting the Gospels as a discourse on social ethics.

Rammohun's interpretation of religion as ethics in the *Precepts* was also consistent with his first known text, the *Tuhfat*. Both texts highlighted the connection between the belief in one God and ethical practices of individual members of society, rejected rituals, miracles and superstitious practices in religion, stressed the crucial importance of ethics in contemporary society and cited ecclesiastical authorities as primary reasons for social conflict. On the crucial point of social conflict, the *Tuhfat* argued that:

Followers of certain religions believe that the Creator created mankind for discharging duties connected with the welfare of the present, past and future life by observing the tenets of that particular religion. The followers of other religions therefore are liable to punishments and torments in future because they differ from them in articles of faith. Consequently the seeds of dogma and prejudice are sown in their hearts. Instead of sincerity, followers of different religions condemn each other [...] this is in spite of all of them enjoying same pains and

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<sup>901</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ii, ed. Nag and Burman, 140.

pleasures of spring, rain, health as well as inconveniences, pain and gloominess without any distinctions of being a follower of a particular religion.<sup>902</sup>

The conceptual architecture of the *Precepts* further elaborated on important aspects and limitations of the *Tuhfat and* influenced Rammohun's interpretation of ethics and ethical practice in tracts on Hindu scripture.

Rammohun's writings on the Gospels also contributed to the framework of later writings such as the *Exposition*. Notably, the introduction of the *Exposition* which outlined the phases of Company rule can also be seen in the *Brahmunical Magazine*. As the first chapter showed, the *Exposition* articulated Rammohun's political thought. The conceptual similarities with the *Magazine* show that Rammohun's arguments of the Gospels of the New Testament of the Bible as a tool of colonialism was an important precursor to the *Exposition*- the most detailed statement of his political thought that we possess.

We conclude that the Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible was crucial to Rammohun's political thought for is methodological contributions to texts such as the *Exposition*, its influence on his interpretations of ethical practice in Hindu scripture and for engaging a European and British audience to perceive *his* political thought in terms of a tradition that *they* were familiar with.

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<sup>902</sup> *Tuhfat*, 8.



## **Conclusion: The political thought of Rammohun Roy, c. 1803-32**

In my thesis, I have argued that the most important context of the writings of Rammohun Roy was making the political power of the East India Company accountable to an ethical Bengali public. From 1803-32, Rammohun consistently articulated the importance of societal ethics and the impact of the distance between London and Bengal on the Company's accountability to its subjects in writings on Hindu scripture, property law, *Sati* and the Gospels.

The most developed form of this argument was the *Exposition*, published in London in 1832. Unlike his other writings, which were short tracts, the *Exposition* was a text. It was primarily concerned with the Company's revenue and the judicial administration in Bengal. But it was not merely a source on agrarian and institutional history. The *Exposition* also outlined Rammohun's suggestions for changes in the Company governance. Rammohun advocated a complete restructuring of Company administration by which an 'isolated commercial body' which governed primarily by 'the exertion of superior force' could transition into a government concerned with the welfare of its inhabitants and be accountable to them. Rammohun's suggestions were influenced by his own association with the Company (1804-14). Thus his association with the Company is an important historical context to his political thought.

Rammohun was associated with Company in the districts of Decca-Jelalpur, Ramghur, Bhagalpur and Rangpur in the revenue department. He was formally employed as a *Dewan*, *Faujdar* and (Acting) *Sheristedar* but also worked in an informal capacity as a *Munshi* (language teacher). Rammohun's period of association with the East India

Company was also a very distinct phase of Company rule in Bengal. During this period, the working relationship between Company officials and native employees was fluid and informal. By this I mean that there were no fixed eligibility criterion for employment under the Company. For instance, Company officials in the districts appointed their employees based on prior informal acquaintance. The Company at Calcutta formalised native appointments, but did not stipulate rules, regulations, and laws for native employees. For Calcutta, the focus of governance was the man-on-the-spot in the districts.

This does not however mean that native employees did not have an important role in Company administration. Company officials in the districts depended on their native employees to read official documents and native petitions in Persian, pay revenue receipts (*challan*), take witness statements and even took their advice on matters pertaining to the Company's regulations. Though it had been nearly two decades since he had left the Company, the role of the native employee in governance was championed by Rammohun in the *Exposition*. Thus Rammohun clearly had a high opinion of the capabilities of native employees. It was also from his experience with the Company in the districts of Bengal that he opined that Company Revenue Collectors were an unnecessary 'establishment cost' and could be done away with.

In current historiography however, Rammohun's period of association with the Company is not given any importance. From the writings of Rajani Palme Dutt in the 1940's to that of Sudipta Kaviraj in 2013, native employees have not been given much importance either. This lack of context prevents us from gaining an important

perspective on Rammohun's political thought. It also ignores the intellectual background of the native employees.

In this context, recent research by Kumkum Chatterjee on the scribal elite in Bengal in the late-eighteenth century has given us an important perspective into the intellectual background of the early-nineteenth century native employees. The scribal elite were overwhelmingly Hindu, upper-caste, and educated Arabic and Persian in *madrasas*. Most members of the scribal elite came from families who had been educated in *madrasas* for generations. This was also Rammohun's background. As he noted in an autographical letter:

My ancestors were Brahmins of a high order [who] about a hundred and forty years ago gave up spiritual exercises for worldly pursuit [...] and according to the usual fate of couriers with various success sometimes rising to honour and sometimes falling; sometimes rich and sometimes poor; sometimes excelling in success and sometimes miserable in disappointment. In conformity with the usage of my paternal race and the wish of my father, I studied the Arabic and Persian languages- these being indispensable to those who attached themselves to the courts of Mohameddan princes.<sup>903</sup>

Clearly, Rammohun was a member of an intergenerational scribal elite. We note that some of Rammohun's critics were also members of an inter-generational scribal elite. Ram Comul Sen for example was a Bengali Kayastha educated in Persian.

Persian was an important intellectual context in early-nineteenth century Bengal. In 1817, Ram Comul Sen collaborated with Tarini Chandra Mitra and Radhakanta Deb to translate Persian stories into Bengali. Their book on the subject, *Persian moral tales*,

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<sup>903</sup>Collet, *Rammohun Roy*, 496.

was a success and ran into (at least) three editions. Their project of popularising the ideas of popularising Persian stories in Bengali shows that the language retained its importance in the early-nineteenth century amongst the native elite. We note that Deb was also Rammohun's critic and founded the *Dharma Sabha* to protest against his ideas of *Sati*. The use of Persian thus cut across ideological lines, and informed a broader intellectual context in Bengal.

The question that arises is whether it is possible to get some understanding of Rammohun's education in the 'Arabic and Persian languages'. In this context, Muzaffar Alam showed that *madrasas* followed a syllabi (originally conceptualised by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, r.1556-1606) which included geometry, astronomy, measurement, Perso-Arabic political thought, Persian poetry and literature. Chatterjee argued in this context that the *madrasa* syllabi in Bengal was heavily influenced by Akbar's ideas of *madrasa* education. She further noted that an education in the *madrasas* also led to the scribal elite to actively participate in a Persian public sphere that extended to all former dominions of the Mughal Empire. As Chatterjee argued:

The use of Persian as a state language [by the Mughals] inaugurated the trend among many Hindu/scribal communities to take up the study of Persian on account of career related opportunities associated with it. There were widespread results due to the territorial extent and administrative penetration of the Mughal Empire.<sup>904</sup>

In this context, we note that Rammohun not only identified with a scribal elite community educated in *madrasas* in Bengal but 'a system of education which has

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<sup>904</sup>Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 219.

hitherto existed among the respectable classes' in India. This can be seen in the

*Exposition*:

I [Rammohun] wish to be distinctly understood that by education [I am] referring [to] those natives in India who have been brought up under a mixed system of Hindu and Muhammadan education which has hitherto existed among the respectable classes. The present generation of [Bengali]youth particularly at the Presidency[of Bengal] bred up in communication and intercourse more or less with the Europeans are progressively becoming imbued with their manners, habits, dress and will in the course of time most probably approximate very nearly to them.<sup>905</sup>

The fact that Rammohun acknowledged the importance of a *madrassa* education in a text written in English, in London, for a British readership shows that Perso-Arabic early modern thought remained an important context in his writings, from his very first tract, the *Tuḥfat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* in 1803 till his last major work, the *Exposition* in 1832. The influence of early modern thought on Rammohun's writings however is an understudied area of research in historical scholarship.

In this context, the thesis has attempted to focus on the influence of early-modern thought on Rammohun's writings. I have argued that the *Tuḥfat* was influenced by Perso-Arabic political philosophy, *akhlāq* and the best known text of the *akhlāq* genre, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. I have also shown that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* was a familiar text in early-nineteenth century Bengal, known to Company officials and native intellectuals.

The *Tuḥfat* and *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* share certain similarities. We note that the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* is primarily a text of ethics and though a Persian text, referred to an extensive

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<sup>905</sup> *English Works of Rammohun Roy*, eds. Nag and Burman, ii, 68.

Arabic vocabulary. According with G.M. Wickens, this was on account of its use of syllogisms, for which Arabic is better suited than Persian. In this context, we note that the *Tuhfat* primarily articulated an argument about ethics and ethical practice. Its ideas of ethics showed a distinct similarity with that of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. Further, though a Persian text, the *Tuhfat* also referred heavily to Arabic words on account of its syllogistic stricture.

The *Tuhfat* however demonstrated a concern with accessibility which went beyond its syllogistic structure. This can be seen in its references to Persian poetry to explain complicated arguments. Thus, we see that arguments concerning ethical practice and the origins of social conflict was made by referring to Hafiz, one of the most well-known poets of the early-nineteenth century in Bengal.

The *Tuhfat* was concerned with the role of religion in contemporary Bengali society. Its ideas on religious practices and critique of ecclesiastical authorities (*Mujtahids*) were developed in later writings on Hindu scripture at Calcutta. For instance, the *Tuhfat*'s ideas of ethical practice, the human soul, conceptual categories such as 'nature' and 'habit' feature in many subsequent writings. Thus, a continuity of its ideas can be seen in Rammohun's later works. Current historiography however has seen the *Tuhfat* as an isolated text, with little or no influence on later writings. One reason for this could be that the *Tuhfat* was not referred in any other work.

Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture were also written in a different style from the *Tuhfat* and appealed to a different audience. While the latter was written for a Persian educated native elite, the former was addressed to the Bengali 'public' (*sarvasadharan lok*). While some historians are sceptical of the role of the Bengali

public in Rammohun's writings, the thesis has drawn on recent research on the history of the book to show that the Bengali public sphere was characterised by traditions of orality, manuscript culture and print, which re-enforced and consolidated each other. As Francesca Orsini showed, the popularity of a tract/text did not depend upon the print literacy of its intended readership, but rather the ability of the author to be 'oral-literate'- i.e. successfully incorporate and appeal to oral traditions (such as that of reading aloud, for example) in order to make his/her writings more accessible.<sup>906</sup>

Orsini's ideas concerning print, orality and manuscript culture points to new ways in which intellectual history of this period can be studied. With reference to Rammohun's works, we have very little current information on the social and material conditions in which his writings were produced, 'the material form of each individual tract, its choice of script, its historical and social location'.<sup>907</sup> Further research in this area could reveal vital clues about the traditions of orality and print in Rammohun's works.

As the thesis showed, Rammohun was 'oral-literate'. The majority of his Bengali writings were humorous, informal, dramatic, ironical, sarcastic, consistent and short. This would have made them easy to narrate and read aloud. Rammohun also used shorter sentences and smaller words than his contemporaries (such as Mrityunjay Vidyalankar), ensuring a greater clarity of prose. He published in the popular press and distributed his works for free, enabling a greater circulation of his works. We have seen

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<sup>906</sup> The term 'oral-literate' was coined by V. Narayan Rao. Cited in Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xiv.

<sup>907</sup> Orsini, 'Introduction', *History of the Book*, xiii.

that throughout his career, Rammohun's priority remained free tracts from the popular press over more prestigious projects from the elite presses in Calcutta.

The question that arises is, do we have evidence of the circulation of Rammohun's works? In this context, contemporary publication data shows that Rammohun's works on Hindu scripture were widely reprinted in Calcutta during his lifetime. This shows that they were circulated. After his death, Rammohun's works were priced and published by private publishers. This shows that publishers clearly perceived a market for his writings.

It was not Rammohun's *name* that prompted the sale of his works, but rather what accounted for their popularity was the *manner in which he made his arguments*. This can be seen from the reprinting of his pseudonymous Bengali tracts such as *Dialogue between a theist and an idolater (Brāhma Pauttalik Saṃvād)* in the mid-nineteenth century by private publishers. The *Dialogue between a theist and an idolater* was discovered to be of Rammohun's authorship only in 1963.<sup>908</sup> Further, it never figured as a part of the official compilations of his works made by Debendranath Tagore, *Tattvabodhini Sabha*, *Adi Brahma Samaj*, Raj Narain Bose, J.C. Ghose and *Sadharan Brahma Samaj* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This shows that the reception of Rammohun's works cannot only be seen as the work of a Bengali elite intellectual.

Rammohun's translation and interpretation of Hindu scripture was always in the context of his project of ethics and social reform. He frequently departed from the

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<sup>908</sup> Roy, Rammohun, *Dialogue between a Theist and an Idolater: An 1820 tract*, (ed. and trans.) Stephen Hay (Calcutta, 1963).



texts of Hindu scripture to include his own observations on social practice. Thus translations of the *Upaniṣads* (1816-9) were not only translations of these texts but also argued that Early-Indian writings prohibited female infanticide and polygamy. This prompted criticism from Mrityunjay Vidyalankar who rightly argued that Rammohun had introduced 'innovations' in the text. Similar, Rammohun's writings on the *Vedānta Sūtra* (1815) criticised Brahminical power and reinterpreted religious practices as ethical practices and the *Gāyathrī* (1830) interpreted worship as a case for everyday ethical conduct. Interpreting religious scripture as ethics was a vital part of Rammohun's project.

In this context, Dermot Killingley has shown that Rammohun's interpretations of the *Vedānta Sūtra* was not always objectively true. For example, Rammohun included arguments such as discussions of the human soul, the ethical householder and ethical practice in society which were not present in the *Vedānta Sūtra*, or any of its commentaries, or indeed in any of the writings of Hindu thinkers. We note however that these arguments were present in the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture may therefore have a broader intellectual context than is currently recognised. Further research in the area might reveal a greater degree of cohesion and a richer intellectual context than is currently known.

Rammohun's concern with ethics and reform can also be seen in tracts on *Sati* (1818-31) which interpreted the practice as fundamentally unethical and illegal. Rammohun interpreted Early-Indian legal texts, the *Dharmaśāstras* as authoritative prescriptions of ethics to stress that these texts did not in fact which did not advocate the practice.

Rammohun may have referred to the *Dharmaśāstras* because it was referred widely by native intellectuals in Calcutta. Rammohun's contemporaries, Ramchandra Vidyavagis and Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, Radhakanta Deb and Anantarama Vidyavagisaktr also referred extensively to the *Dharmaśāstras*.<sup>909</sup>

Brian Hatcher observes that in the case of these early-nineteenth century Bengali intellectuals, the *Dharmaśāstras* were not interpreted from the standpoint of a classical liberal or conservative ideology, but rather the point was to refer to these texts to advocate different world views, explore new social contexts, practices and colonial technologies. In this way, native intellectuals explored a range of issues, concerns with 'the existing norms of textual authority, social order, debate and argumentation to engage with an emerging set of colonial policies, institutions, material tools and professional opportunities'.<sup>910</sup> It is unsurprising therefore that Rammohun referred to these texts to highlight *his* arguments about social practices, ethics and accountability.

Hatcher's observations regarding the use of the *Dharmaśāstras* in the nineteenth century clearly indicate that native intellectuals did not only 'appeal' to the *Dharmaśāstras* but also 'worked with the *Śāstras*' to interpret new perspectives and ideas of 'rapidly changing norms of epistemology, government and law'. Hatcher's observation is also crucial to our argument. This is because although Rammohun referred to the *Dharmaśāstras* to present his case for governmental accountability, the *śāstras* were actually silent on the question of governmental accountability. In this

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<sup>909</sup> Hatcher, 'Pandits at work', 51-4.

<sup>910</sup> Hatcher, 'Pandits at work', 45-6.

case we seen that Rammohun referred to the *Śāstras*’ to argue an original point in his political thought.<sup>911</sup>

The question that might be raised in this context is the role of the philosophy of *akhlāq* in Rammohun’s interpretation of *Sati*. In this context, we note that the *akhlāq* tradition, though the political philosophy of the Mughal Empire, had its limitations. As Muzaffar Alam has shown, the Mughal Emperors were unable to legislate against *Sati*.<sup>912</sup> Further, texts such as the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* were also silent when it came to the question of how subjects could hold the government accountable. In *Sati* writings on the other hand, Rammohun the Company accountable for its failure to legislate against *Sati*. Rammohun argued that the lack of legislation against *Sati* amounted to misgovernance. This was a clear departure from the *akhlāq* tradition.

The *Dharmaśāstras* were also interpreted in writings on property law (1822-30).

Rammohun criticised the Company for misunderstanding indigenous legal systems, misgovernance and not engaging with Bengali society. He argued that the Company’s interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras* was faulty.

Rammohun’s arguments were not without context. As Nandini Bhattacharyya-Panda has shown, the Company’s interpretation of property law in Bengal was indeed problematic. The Company deliberately imposed a definition of legality on texts such as the *Dāyabhāga* and consciously misinterpreted its advocacy of female inheritance of property. Bhattacharyya-Panda argues that the Company fundamentally altered the argument and scope of the *Dāyabhāga*. In this context, we note that Rammohun’s

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<sup>911</sup> Hatcher, ‘Pandits at work’, 51-4.

<sup>912</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 76.

writings on property law referred to his criticism of the official interpretation of the *Dāyabhāga*. In a lengthy footnote-narrative, in *Brief Remarks* and later in the text of *Ancestral Property*, Rammohun warned Company officials that governments in India had previously collapsed when they did not govern well.

Rammohun's tracts on property law and *Sati* show that Company officials were an important part of his intended readership. Since Company officials were not familiar with the intricacies of *Dharmaśāstric* ideas of property law and the scriptural debate on *Sati*, Rammohun employed a range of categories and concepts to explain his ideas. This familiarised his readers with the subject matter of his arguments in terms that they were familiar with. Rammohun's adoption of terms such as 'constitution', 'common law', 'executive' and 'legislature' was also an implicit acknowledgement that the Company in India represented political traditions rooted in Britain. Rammohun's political thought was expressed in a constitutional idioms in recognition of the colonial context in India.

The question that arises is whether Rammohun's reference to Liberal thought was merely functional, or whether he was intellectually transformed by his reading of Western philosophy. As far as this is concerned, I tentatively suggest that Rammohun's ideas of accountability i.e. the concept of a public holding a government accountable may have been influenced of his ideas of parliamentary forms of government. In future, I would like to pursue this line of enquiry further with further research. This line of argument would not only look in the possible influences of western philosophy of Rammohun, but also the limitations of the approach.

In the context of our argument here, we note that Rammohun's attempt to reach out to an official readership was a part of his political project. He argued that the Company was 'obligated' to introduce reforms in their methods of governance for the welfare of its subjects. He consistently argued that the Company was accountable to Bengali society for its laws, its officials and its judges. He stressed that an ethical 'public' was capable of holding the Company accountable for its government. To articulate this point to the Bengali public, his writings on Hindu scripture consistently reinterpreted religious practices as a case for ethical practices. Thus Rammohun also articulated a project of ethics in society to emphasise the point of governmental accountability.

Rammohun's writings in newspapers such as the *Sambad Kaumadi* and *Mirāt-ul Akhbār* clearly articulated his project of governmental accountability to the public. For example, he protested strongly against restrictions on the freedom of the press in 1823 by arguing that newspapers and journals were important platforms of critique of government policies and channels of communication between administrators and the governed. We note that Rammohun's writings were part of an expanding print culture in Calcutta. In this context, newspapers in Calcutta also responded to Rammohun's writings by producing reviews, and while some were critical, others reprinted his tracts in full. Most importantly, newspapers like the *Calcutta Monthly Journal* also recognised that Rammohun's political thought was concerned with the reinterpretation of religious practices as everyday ethical practices. In this way, the print medium responded, critiqued and in the process- *ensured better circulation* of his political thought. The thesis has centred on Rammohun's tracts and texts. A fruitful line of enquiry for further research would be the precise links between the newspaper reporting of Rammohun's works and his writings. The question that arises here is

whether Rammohun introduced changes in his political thought based on newspaper reports of his works.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that Rammohun's writings on religion and politics were a part of a single project. Rammohun's writings on Hindu scripture and *Tuhfat* articulated an argument for ethical practice. In his interpretation of the *Dharmaśāstras*, Rammohun stressed on governmental accountability and argued that the Company was obligated to its subjects in Bengal to be accountable. His writings on *Sati* made a strong case for ethics and accountability. In 1832, when the Privy Courts at London upheld the decision of the Company to abolish *Sati*, Rammohun wrote:

[...] Hearty congratulations on the protection afforded by the Privy Council to the female community in India. They have removed the odium from our character as a people. As we can no longer be guilty of female murder, we now deserve every improvement, temporal and spiritual.<sup>913</sup>

Henceforth, he opined, the East India Company was accountable to an ethical Bengali public. Rammohun noted that not only did the Privy Council's decision vindicate his political thought but it also set a precedent, which he intended to follow up. The project of *Sati* thus articulated his political thought. But, Rammohun never got the opportunity to follow up the precedent set by the Privy Council or develop his political thought further. He died the next year, in 1833.



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<sup>913</sup> Correspondence of Rammohun Roy, ed. Biswas, 728.

**Table 1: Compiled and Prepared by the Author (sources listed at the end of the Table)  
Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) and their publication history in Calcutta c. 1803-1905**

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, and Persian) c.1803-29	Publishing History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1803 (?) 1804	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tuhfat al-Muwahhidin</i> [A Gift to Deists] (Introduction in Arabic and main text in Persian)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) by Rammohun's son, Ramaprasad Roy (Calcutta, 1859).</li> <li>• (Reprint) by Bhai Baldev Narayan (Patna, 1898).</li> <li>• (English Translation) by Obaidullah el-Obaid undertaken for the Adi Brahmo Samaj (Calcutta, 1884).</li> <li>• (English Translation) by J.C. Ghose (Calcutta, 1906).</li> <li>• (Bengali translation from Obaid's translation) by Jyotirananda Das Commissioned by Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (Calcutta, 1949).</li> <li>• <i>Unpublished, but printed</i> by V. Rai (Calcutta, 1918).</li> </ul>
1815	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Vedāntagrantha</i> (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	
1816	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Vedāntasara</i> (in Bengali) Publishers: 1. Ganga Kishore 2. Lulu Ji Print run: 1000 copies distributed evenly between the publishers.</li> <li>• <i>Īśā Upaniṣad</i> (in Bengali) Publishers: 1. Ganga Kishore 2. Lulu Ji Print run: 1000 copies distributed evenly between the publishers.</li> <li>• <i>Kena Upaniṣad</i> (in Bengali) [the same publishers and print run as <i>Īśā Upaniṣad</i> and <i>Vedāntasara</i>]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1852). Price: 6 annas</li> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, [year not known]) Price: Rupees 4</li> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1839). Price: 4 Annas</li> <li>• <i>Abstract of the Introduction of Rammohun Roy's Bengali Translation of the Īśā Upaniṣad</i>, Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1843).</li> </ul>

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1803-29	Publishing History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1816	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Utsavānader Sahit Vicār</i> (in Sanskrit but using Bengali instead of Nagari alphabets)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not reprinted in any of Rammohun's Collected Bengali works in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Presumed lost until 1918.</li> </ul>
1817	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> (In Bengali) Publisher: Lulu Ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i> (In Bengali) Publisher: Lulu Ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Second Defence of Hindu Theism</i> (In Bengali) Publisher: Lulu Ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Bṛihādānyaka Upaniṣad</i> (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār</i> Also appeared in English as <i>Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas</i> in 1817</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1840). Price: 3 annas</li> <li>• <i>Abstract of Rammohun's Debate with a Bhattacharya</i>, Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> </ul>



Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, and Persian) c.1803-29	Publishing History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1818	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sahamaraṇ Viṣaye Pravartak o Nivartak Saṁvād</i> (in Bengali) Publisher: Huru Roy Print run: 500 copies Also appeared in English as <i>Translation of a Conference between an advocate for and an opponent of Burning Widows Alive from the original Bungla</i> in 1818.</li> <li>• <i>Gāyatrīr Artha</i> [The Meaning of the <i>Gāyathrī</i>] (in Bengali) Publisher: Lulu Ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad</i> (in Bengali) Publisher: Lulu Ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• Debate with Ramgopal Suromana (in Bengali) Publisher: Lulu ji Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Gosvāmīr Sahit Vicār</i> [Debate with <i>Goswāmī</i>] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Abstract of Rammohun Roy's Introduction to the Bengali Translation of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad</i>, Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> <li>• <i>Abstract of Rammohun's Controversy with a Goswāmī</i>, Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> </ul>

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1803-29	Publishing History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1819	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sahamaraṇ Viṣaye Pravartak o Nivartaker Dvitīya Saṁvād</i> (in Bengali) Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print Run: 500 copies Also appeared in English as <i>A Second Conference between an advocate for and an opponent of Burning Widows Alive</i></li> <li>• <i>Atmānātmaviveka</i> [Translation of a work by Shankara] (in Bengali)<sup>914</sup></li> </ul>	
1820	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Subramanya Shastrir Sahit Vichār</i> [Debate with Subramanya Shastri] (in Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit and a Bengali transliteration of Sanskrit)  Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print run: 500 copies of each language translation. Appeared in English as <i>Apology for the pursuit of final beatitude independently of Brahmunical observances</i></li> <li>• <i>Kavitakarer Sahit Vichār</i> [Debate with Kavitarakar] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	

<sup>914</sup> The authorship of this tract has been disputed. Pradyumna Bhattacharya, 'Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose' in V.C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India* (Delhi, 1975), 204.

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1803-29	Publication History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1820	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Brāhma Pauttalik Saṃvād</i> [Dialogue between a Theist and an idolater] (In Bengali) Written under a pseudonym- Brajamohun Majumdar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1846). Price: 4 annas. Still attributed to Brajamohun Majumdar</li> </ul>
1821	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Precepts of Jesus (in Bengali) Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print Run: 500 copies</li> <li>• The Precepts of Jesus (in Sanskrit) Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print Run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Brāhmaṇ O Misinari Saṃvād</i> Nos. 1,2,3 [Brahmunical Magazine] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Pādri o Śiṣya Saṃvād</i> [A Padre and his disciple.] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	
1823	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cāri Praśner Uttar</i> [Reply to Four Questions] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Pathyapradān</i> [Medicine for the sick offered by one who laments his inability to perform righteousness] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Gurupādukā</i> [Reply to a pseudonymous polemic] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1848). Price: 8 Annas</li> </ul>

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1803-29	Publication History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1824	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Prārthāna Patra</i> [Prayer Letter] (in Bengali) Also Appeared in English as <i>Humble Suggestions to his countrymen who believe in One God</i> in 1824.</li> </ul>	
1826	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Brahmaṇiṣṭha Gṛhasther Lakṣmaṇ</i> [On characteristics of <i>Brahmo</i> Householders] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Kāyasther Sahit Madyapān Viṣayak Vicār</i> [<i>Shastric</i> disputation with a <i>Kayastha</i> on drinking wine] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1853). Print run: 500 copies Price: 6 annas</li> </ul>
1827	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gāyatrī</i> <i>Paramopāsanāvidhānam</i> [On <i>Gayāthri</i> and worship] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Vajrasūcī</i> [translation of a <i>Mahayana Buddhist</i> text, <i>Prathama-nirṇaya</i> elaborating on the meaning of <i>Brāhmaṇa</i>] (In Sanskrit and Bengali)</li> </ul>	

Year	Works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1803-29	Publication History of Rammohun's works in Bengali and other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian) c.1834-1905
1828	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Brahmo Songeet</i> [Brahmo songs] (in Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Brahmopāsanā</i> [<i>Brahmo</i> Observances] (in Bengali)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1835). Price: 4 annas</li> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1844). Price: 6 paise</li> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press Print run: 500 copies Price 4 annas. Rev. J Long remarked that the 1853 reprints were 'much used' in Bengali society at the time. (Calcutta, 1853).</li> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1889).</li> </ul>
1829	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sahamaraṇ Viṣay</i> [On <i>Sati</i>] (In Bengali)</li> <li>• <i>Anuṣṭhān</i> [Catechism of divine worship] (In Bengali)</li> </ul>	

Year	Compilations of Rammohun's Bengali works after his death in 1833	Publishing History of the Compilations of Rammohun's Bengali works after his death in 1833
1834	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gauḍīya Vyākaraṇ</i> [ A textbook of Bengali Grammar] (in Bengali) (posthumous) Publisher: Calcutta School Book Society. Number of Copies: 1930 Price: 8 Annas</li> </ul> <p>[Prepared for the press by Rammohun's son, Radhaprasad Roy]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1845). Price: 5 annas.</li> <li>• Four editions followed, with the last one in 1856. All published by the Calcutta School Book Society.</li> </ul>
1839	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bengali Works of Rammohun Roy Publisher: privately printed by one of Rammohun's collaborators and member of the Brahmo Samaj, Anandamohun Bannerjee. <i>The Calcutta Courier</i> reported on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1840 that the copies were distributed for free to the Bengali public.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press, (Calcutta, 1872).</li> </ul>

Year	Compilations of Rammohun's Bengali works after his death in 1833	Publishing History of the Compilations of Rammohun's Bengali works after his death in 1833
1840-1848	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bengali works of Rammohun Roy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <i>Pāncho-Upaniṣad</i> [Five <i>Upaniṣads</i> of Rammohun Roy: <i>Īśā, Cena, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Kaṭha</i>]</li> <li>(b) <i>Selections from the several books of the Vedānta by Raja Rammohun Roy</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Published by Debendranath Tagore for <i>Tattvabodhini Sabha</i>, Calcutta.</p> <p>Also serialised in the monthly <i>Tattvabodhini Patrika</i>, ed. Akshay Kumar Dutta in Calcutta</p>	
1873-1880	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Raja Rammohun Roy Prōnit Grānthabālī</i> [Bengali and Sanskrit works of Rammohun Roy] Compiled and Published by Raj Narain Bose and Anandachandra Vedantavagis Printed: Adi Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta.</li> </ul>	
1905	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Raja Rammohun Ray-er Sanskrit O Bangla Rachnāvalī</i> [Raja Rammohun Roy's Collected Bengali works] Printed: Panini Press, Allahabad and Calcutta</li> </ul>	

## Note

The Bengali titles of Rammohun's works and their reprints were not given in the catalogues of James Long and the Calcutta School Book Society. Thus, Bengali titles unfortunately could not be provided throughout. Publishing information has been provided wherever available.

## Sources

1. *Returns Relating to Native Printing presses and publications in Bengal: A Return of the names and writings of 515 persons connected with Bengali literature, either as authors or translations of printed works chiefly during the last fifty years and a catalogue of Bengali newspapers and periodicals which have issued from the press from the year 1818 to 1855 submitted to Government by the Rev. J. Long* (Calcutta, 1855). Henceforth, *Returns*
  - a. List of Books and pamphlets issued in Calcutta in 1853-4, 8-20.
  - b. Register of Bengali authors, editors and translators, 41-62.
2. *The First Report of the Calcutta School Book Society [CSBS] read at the first annual General Meetings of the subscribers, held at the Town Hall of Calcutta, July 4, 1818, with an appendix, a list of contributions received and the accounts of the institutions for the year 1817-1818* (Calcutta, 1818). Henceforth *First Report*.
3. *The Seventh Report of the Calcutta School Book Society's Proceedings, Eighth and Ninth years, 1826-27 with an appendix, the accounts of the institution, Read the 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1828* (Calcutta, 1828), 4. Rammohun Requested by CSBS to write a Bengali grammar book in Bengali for native students. Henceforth *Seventh Report*.
4. *The Ninth Report of the Calcutta School Book Proceedings, thirteenth and fourteenth years, 1830-1 with an appendix, the accounts of the institution, Read February 1832*. (Calcutta, 1832), 9. Rammohun's Bengali grammar delayed, astronomy book delayed over circumstances which the CSBS 'cannot control'. Henceforth *Ninth Report*.
5. *The Tenth Report of the Calcutta School Book Society's proceedings. Fifteen and Sixteenth years, 1832-22, with an appendix, the accounts of the Institution, Read 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1834* (Calcutta, 1834). Henceforth *Tenth Report*.
  - a. Tenth Report, 1-22.
  - b. Appendix No. 1: List of Books Issued from the CSBS depository 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 1832-31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1833, 23-26.
  - c. Appendix, No. 2: Depository List, 27-31.



6. *The Father of Modern India, Commemoration Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations*, ed. Satis Chandra Chakravarty (Calcutta, 1935).
- A. Catalogue of an Exhibition of Rammohun's relics and writings, 29-41.
  - a. Rammohun Roy's writings newly discovered, exhibit nos. 30, 31, 32, 30A, 31A, 32A, 33, 34.
  - b. Rammohun Roy's Publications, first editions, exhibit nos. 35, 35A, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.
  - c. Rammohun Roy's Publications, later editions, exhibit nos. 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56.
  - d. Abstracts or Collections, made by others, of Rammohun Roy's writings, exhibit nos. 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82.
  - e. Collected works of Rammohun Roy, exhibit Nos. 83, 84, 85, 86.
- B. Appendix E: A list of the principal publications and other writings of Raja Rammohun Roy in Persian, Bengali, English, Sanskrit and Hindi in chronological order, 133-147.
7. *The Golden Book of Rammohun Roy: Published on the occasion of the 225<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Saroj Mohan Mitra (Calcutta, 1997).
  - a. Appendix E: A list of the principal publications and other writings of Raja Rammohun Roy in Persian, Bengali, English, Sanskrit and Hindi in chronological order, 562-574.
8. *Catalogue of the Vernacular Literature Committee's Library, compiled by Rev. J. Long* (Calcutta, 1855). Henceforth, *Vernacular Catalogue*.

**Table 2: Rammohun Roy's works in English and their Publication History in Calcutta. Compiled and Prepared by the Author. Sources listed at the end of the Table.**

Year	Works in English, c.1816-31	Publishing History of works in English , c.1816-1906
1816	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Translation of the Abridgement of the Vedānta</i> Publisher: Times Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Translation of the Īśā Upaniṣad</i> Publisher: Hindustani Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Translation of the Cena Upaniṣad</i> Publisher: Hindustani Press Print run: 500 copies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> </ul>
1817	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Defence of Hindu Theism in reply to an Advocate for Idolatry at Madras</i> Publisher: Times Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas in reply to an apology for the present state of Hindu worship</i> Publisher: Mr. Johnson Print run: 500 copies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> </ul>
1818	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Translation of a Conference between an advocate for and an opponent of Burning Widows Alive from the original Bungla</i> Publisher: Baptist Mission press Print run: 1000 copies</li> </ul>	
1819	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Translation of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i> Publisher: Times Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Translation of Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> Publisher: Times Press Print run: 500 copies</li> </ul>	

Year	Works in English, c.1816-31	Publication History of Works in English, c.1816-1906
1820	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>An apology for the pursuit of final beatitude independently of Brahmunicipal observances in Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and English</i> Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>A Second Conference between an advocate for and an opponent of Burning Widows Alive</i> Publisher: Baptist Mission press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>The Precepts of Jesus: Extracted from the Books of the New Testament ascribed to the four Evangelists</i> Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>An Appeal to the Christian public in defence of the Precepts of Jesus by a Friend of Truth</i> Publisher: Baptist Mission Press Print run: 500 copies</li> <li>• <i>Reply to the observations of the Editor of the Friend of India on the above appeal</i> Publisher: Mirror Press Print run: 500 copies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reprint, Tattvabodhini Sabha Press (Calcutta, 1844).</li> <li>• Bengali Translation by Rakhaldas Halder in 1844</li> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1859).</li> </ul>
1821	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Brahmunicipal Magazine</i> Nos. 1,2,3</li> </ul>	
1822	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu law of Inheritance</i> Publisher: Unitarian Press, Calcutta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1853).</li> </ul>

Year	Works in English c.1816-31	Publishing History of works in English, 1816-1906
1823	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Brahmunical Magazine, no. 4</i></li> <li>• <i>Humble Suggestions to His Countrymen who believe in One God</i></li> <li>• <i>A Vindication of the Incarnation of the Deity as the common basis on Hinduism and Christianity against the attacks of R. Tytler</i></li> <li>• <i>Petitions against the Press Regulations</i> (a) <i>Memorial to the Supreme Court</i> (b) <i>Appeal to the King in Council</i></li> <li>• <i>A letter on English Education Lord Amherst, Governor General in Council</i></li> <li>• <i>Final Precepts of Jesus</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Edition, Unitarian Press (Calcutta, 1823).</li> </ul>
1823	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dialogue between a Missionary and Three Chinese Converts</i></li> </ul>	
1824	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A letter to Rev. Henry Ware on Prospects of Christianity in India</i></li> </ul>	
1825	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Translation of a Sanskrit Tract on Different Modes of Worship</i></li> </ul>	
1826	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bengali Grammar in the English Language</i> Publisher: Unitarian Press Price: Rupee 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Reprint) (Calcutta, 1845). Price 5 annas</li> <li>• (Reprint) <i>Tattvabodhini Patrika</i> (Monthly Journal of the Adi Brahmo Samaj) (Calcutta, 1933).</li> </ul>

Year	Works in English, c. 1816-31	Publishing History of works in English, 1816-1906
1827	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Translation of a Sanskrit Tract, inculcating the Divine Worship esteemed by those who believe in the revelation of the Vedas as the most appropriate to the nature of the Supreme Being</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (New Edition in English), <i>Brahmunical Magazine</i>, 1,2,3,4 (Calcutta, 1827).</li> <li>• (Reprint) Tattvabodhini Sabha Press, (Calcutta, 1844).</li> </ul>
1828	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Answer of a Hindu to the question of “Why do you frequent a Unitarian place of worship instead of numerous attended Unitarian Churches?”</i></li> <li>• <i>Petition to the Government against Regulation III of 1828 for the Resumption of Lakhiraj Lands</i></li> </ul>	
1829	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Universal Religion: Religious Instructions founded on sacred authorities.</i></li> </ul>	
1830	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Abstract of the arguments regarding the Burning of Widows considered as a religious rite.</i></li> <li>• <i>Essays on the Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property according to the Law of Bengal.</i></li> <li>• <i>Letters on the Hindu Right of Inheritance.</i></li> <li>• <i>Address to Lord William Bentinck Governor General of India upon the passing of the Act for the Abolition of Sati.</i></li> </ul>	
1831	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Petition to the House of Commons to the Memorial of the advocates of Sati. [written in response to the petition of the Dharma Sabha]</i></li> </ul>	

Post 1831	Rammohun did not publish any tracts in English after 1831 in Calcutta	
1833	Death of Rammohun Roy	

Year	Compilations of Rammohun Roy's works in English undertaken after his death in 1833	Publication History of the compilation of Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali undertaken after his death in 1833
1840-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English Works of Rammohun Roy Undertaken by Debendranath Tagore for <i>Tattvabodhini Sabha</i></li> <li>Translations of Rammohun's <i>Upaniṣads</i> Undertaken by Debendranath Tagore for <i>Tattvabodhini Sabha</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Reprint), Tattvabodhini Sabha Press, (Calcutta, 1872).</li> </ul>
1885	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy, edited with an Introduction by Jogendra Chunder Ghose, volume I.</li> </ul>	
1887	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy, edited with an Introduction by Jogendra Chunder Ghose, volume II.</li> </ul>	
1901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English Works of Rammohun Roy, edited by Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, published by Srikanta Roy in Calcutta.</li> </ul>	
1906	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English Works of Rammohun Roy and an English Translation of the <i>Tuḥfat</i>, edited by Jogendra Chandra Ghosh.</li> </ul>	

## Unpublished

*Rammohun Roy's Geography* commissioned by the CSBS in 1817. Appeared as unpublished in:

- *Second Report*, Appendix no 18, Synopsis of the various works of their several editions, 97.
- *Fourth Report*, Appendix v, 36.
- *Fifth Report*, Appendix vii, 36.

## Uncredited

Rammohun helped with the publication of *Ferguson's Hindu astronomy*. Originally commissioned by the CSBS in 1817, the project ran into problems because of lack of technical information about translation of specific Sanskrit words into English. In 1820, Rammohun was asked by the CSBS to help with the work, which he agreed. Finally published in 1834 after years of delays. Rammohun's contribution was not acknowledged.

- *Tenth Report of the CSBS* (Calcutta, 1830) Appendix, No. 2, Depository List, 27-31.

## Sources

1. *Second Report*
  - a. *Synopsis of the various works and their several editions published by and for the Calcutta School Book Society, during the first two years of its establishment; with the works for which it is under engagements*, 97.
  - b. *No. II, Memorandum of the indigenous works which have appeared from the native presses, drawn up for the Calcutta School Book Society Committee by the Corresponding Secretary*, 47.
2. The Golden Book of Rammohun Roy, ed. Saroj Mohan Mitra, Calcutta, 1997, 562-574.
3. *Returns Relating to Native Printing presses and publications in Bengal by the Rev. J. Long* (Calcutta, 1855).
  - a. *List of Books and pamphlets issued in Calcutta in 1853-4 or the Bengal year 1260*, 8-20.
  - b. *Register of Bengali Authors, editors, translators*, 41-62.



**Table 3: ‘Popular’ Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society**

Note: Diacritical marks have not been used. The table is has been transcribed from the original document produced by the Calcutta School Book Society. This is to give a perspective into the ways in which tracts were catalogued and organised in Calcutta.

All writings in **bold** are by Rammohun Roy. We find that 14 of the 65 tracts are attributable to him. One tract is a pseudonymous publication. He is the most visibly productive author in the popular press at the time. Since 33 of the tracts do not have authors and translators mentioned, we can also conclude that anonymity was widely practised in the publication of tracts. All translations are by the Calcutta School Book society. The tracts 15-22 have identical titles because they were deliberately not translated by the society at the behest of the Sanskrit *Pandits* employed by them. This is because they constituted low print cultures.

The list below shows that Rammohun was published by publishers of low print cultures as well. This shows the populist bent of the writings. By not restricting the publications to the exclusively elite presses (such as the Baptist Mission press), Rammohun was making a point about the accessibility of his work.

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society	Author	Publisher
1	Description of Krishna and the gods of the Hindus with an account of Jesus Christ and Muhammad [ <i>Karuna Nidhan Bilas</i> ]	Kali Shankar Ghoshal	Lulu Ji
2	Account of the Ten Incarnations of Krishna [ <i>Das Avatar Kotha</i> ]	Not known	Not known
3	Amours of Krishna [ <i>Podancho Duto</i> ]	Not known	Not known
4	Legends of Krishna by a blind man [ <i>Bilbo Mangal</i> ]	Not known	Not known
5	Praises of Krishna [ <i>Narada Sambad</i> ]	Not known	De Souza
6	Account of Krishna [ <i>Jaya Deva</i> ]	Not known	Not known
7	Account of Kali [ <i>Chandi</i> ]	Not known	Not known
8	Account of Durga and other gods [ <i>Anuda Mangal</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya
9	Praises of Shiva [ <i>Mahima Staba</i> ]	Not known	Lulu Ji
10	Praises of Ganga and Ganges River [ <i>Ganga Taringini</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya
11	Geeta Govinda by Jaideva [ <i>Geeta Govinda</i> ] Price: Rupee 1	Translator not mentioned.	Biswanath De

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book Society	Author	Publisher
12	Praises of Chaitanya (founder of the Chaitanya sect)[ <i>Narotoma Bilas</i> ]	Not known	Not known
13	Account of Chaitanya [ <i>Chaitanya Charitra</i> ]	Not known	Not known
14	The amours of a Prince and Princess [ <i>Bidya Sundar</i> ]	Not known	Biswanath De
15	On the choice of women [ <i>Rosho Manjari</i> ]	Not known	Biswanath De
16	On the choice of women [ <i>Roti Manjari</i> ]	Not known	Biswanath De
17	On the choice of women [ <i>Adiros</i> ]	Not known	Biswanath De
18	On the choice of women [ <i>Rosho Podhiti</i> ]	Not known	De Souza
19	On the choice of women [ <i>Shringar Tilok</i> ]	Not known	Not known
20	On the choice of women [ <i>Kama Shastra</i> ]	Not known	Not known
21	On the choice of women [ <i>Roti Kula</i> ]	Not known	Not known
22	On the choice of women [ <i>Roti Bilas</i> ]	Not known	Not known
23	Rules for acquisition and preservation of wealth [ <i>Lakshmi Charitra</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society	Author	Publisher
24	Twenty Five tales of Betal (companion to the mythical King Vikramaditya) [ <i>Betal Panchabingsoti</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya
25	Thirty two thrones [ <i>Batris Singhasan</i> ]	Mrityunjay Vidyalankar	Serampore Press
26	Tales of a Parrot [ <i>Toti Itihas</i> ]	Not known	Not known
27	<b>Translation of the Vedanta</b>	Rammohun Roy	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya- 500 copies Lulu ji- 500 Copies
28	The Bhagvad Gita	Translator not known	Not known
29	<b>Translation of Isho Upanishad</b>	Rammohun Roy	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya- 500 copies Lulu ji- 500 Copies
30	<b>Translation of Cena Upanishad</b>	Rammohun Roy	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya- 500 copies Lulu ji- 500 Copies
31	<b>Translation of Katha Upanishad</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
32	<b>Translation of Mandukya Upanishad</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
33	<b>Translation of Mundaka Upanisad</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
34	<i>Vedanta Chandrika</i> (in defence of Hindu Idolatry against the observations of Rammohun Roy), Price: Rupee 1	Mrityunjay Vidyalankar	Not known

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society	Author	Publisher
35	<b>Reply to the Treatise of Mrityunjay Vidyalkar or the second defence of Hindu Theism</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
36	<b>Reply to Ram Gopal Suromona [Reply to a Goswamin]</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
37	<b>Reply to the Observations of Shoba Shastri</b>	Rammohun Roy	Baptist Mission Press -500 Copies
38	Dialogue between a True believer and an Idolator [ <i>Brahma Pautalik Sambad</i> ]	Birjomohun Majumdar  [pseudonym of Rammohun Roy]	Not known
39	<b>Translation of the Gayathri</b>	Rammohun Roy	Lulu ji-500 Copies
40	Method for gaining true knowledge of God [ <i>Probodh Chadrodayo</i> ]	Not known	Not known
41	<b>Apology for the pursuit of final beatitude independent of Brahmunicipal observances</b>	Rammohun Roy	Baptist Mission Press 500 copies
42	<b>The Precepts of Jesus</b>	Rammohun Roy	Baptist Mission Press 500 copies
43	Verses in Censure of earthly enjoyments [ <i>Shanti- sotok</i> ]	Not known	Not known
44	<i>On the common actions and ceremonies of life</i> [Title is in English]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya
45	Moral Sayings [ <i>Chanakya-Sloka</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society	Author	Publisher
46	Gift to the Guru [ <i>Guru Dakshina</i> ]	Hurochandra Gopal	Serampore Press
47	The trials of Men [ <i>Purush Porikha</i> ]	Tarkalankar Roy	Serampore Press
48	<i>Hitopadesa</i>	Mrityunjay Vidyalkar	Serampore Press
49	On the burning of Widows [ <i>Sahamara</i> ]	Kalachandra Basu	Not known
50	<b>On the burning of widows</b> [ <i>Sahamara Sambad</i> ]	Rammohun Roy	Huro Roy 1000 copies
51	<b>- Second Conference on the burning of widows</b> [ <i>Sahamara Bishoye Ditito Sambad</i> ]	Rammohun Roy	Baptist Mission Press 500 copies
52	History of Raja Krishna Chandra Ray [ <i>Krishna Chandra Charitra</i> ]	Not known	Not known
53	Vocabulary of Umuru Singh, arranged alphabetically and translated from Sanskrit [ <i>Umuru Singh Obidhan</i> ]	Pitambar Mukherjee	Biswanath De
54.	Bengali Grammar [ <i>Vyakaran</i> ]	Muthur Mohun Dutt	Serampore Press
55	English Grammar [ <i>Inglish Darpan</i> ]	Ram Chandra	Not Known
56	English Grammar [ <i>Inglish Darpan</i> ]	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya	Ferris and Co.
57	On ceremonial impurities with rules for mourning [ <i>Asoch Babostha, Asoch Panchali</i> ]	Not Known	Lulu Ji

Serial Number	'Popular' Bengali tracts published in 1820 identified by the Calcutta School Book society	Author	Publisher
58	Book on Medicine [ <i>Ashodho Grantha</i> ]	Ram Comul Sen	Hindustani Press
59	On Astrology [ <i>Prankrishna Muhadadi</i> ]	Gopi Nath Bhattacharya	Biswanath De
60	On Astrology [ <i>Jyotish Shastra</i> ]	Ram Chandra	Lulu ji
61	Description of Dreams [ <i>Swapnapotol</i> ]	Ram Chandra	Lulu ji
62	Astrological almanac [ <i>Ancha Pustak</i> ]	Ram Chandra	Biswanath De
63	Annual Almanacs [ <i>Ponjika</i> ]	Not known	Not known
64	On Poetry [ <i>Rag mala</i> ]	Not known	Not known
65	Rules for Music [ <i>Sangit Tarangini</i> ]	Not known	Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya

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